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The
Opposite
of Like
is Love

Are
You
Okay
With a
(Slightly)
Older
Girlfriend?

vol.4

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The Opposite

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THE STORY SO FAR

High schooler Momota Kaoru is in a slightly secret relationship with his girlfriend, Orihara Hime, who's twelve years older than him. Their relationship had finally been found out by Momota's older sister, Kaede, when they ran into her at Momota's house. However, a rolled omelette Orihara-san prepared caused an unexpected miracle: "Your rolled omelette has the same taste as my mother's," said Kaede.



It turned out that Orihara-san knew Momota's deceased mother. Surprised by their meeting that transcended time, Momota was moved to tears. Still, whether their meeting was fate or not, the two of them wanted to be together. With their feelings for one another renewed, their summer would continue to heat up.



♥ Prologue

“This is absolutely unfair!” I shouted with all my might and slammed both of my hands on the long business table. We were in the fourth-floor conference room of our office building that faced the national highway. This huge room was rarely used, but right now there were some prominent people assembled in it. Branch chiefs, deputy branch managers, section managers... Every person here held a way higher position than I did at our company.

This was Harumi Seikatsu Co. Ltd. We were a publicly listed company whose main business was the development and sale of cosmetics and supplements. In recent years, we had begun to put effort into the development of sports supplements and other such products, and we’d been gaining support from not only female but male customers as well.

I’d been working at the local branch of Harumi Seikatsu since I graduated college. I didn’t have any major accomplishments to speak of, but I hadn’t caused any major problems either, and I could boast that I’d completed the work normally given to me. However, right now, for the very first time, I was butting heads with my company as I was squarely baring my fangs against this distinguished group of people.

“So what if she’s a contract employee?! Komatsu is an employee at this company, a colleague, and my dear junior! You can’t just take credit for the wonderful project she submitted because you’re her boss!”

“Orihara...do you realize what you’re saying?” Section Manager Ebishima’s round face twisted into a scowl as he glared at me. He was a portly middle-aged man who was turning forty this year. He was my direct superior, but...honestly, I didn’t really like him. He was the type of person who never missed a chance to say, “That’s the laid-back generation for you,” and make fun of people my age.

“This project is being highly praised by our company’s headquarters! This should be a major project for the entire company! If it succeeds, our branch’s reputation will go through the roof! There’s no way we could present such an important project under the name of a contract employee from a junior

college!”

The start of all this was an in-office planning competition. It’s a complicated story with the type of sticky internal fighting that you really couldn’t sum up in a few words. In brief, it was the common story of a supervisor trying to claim the idea of a contract employee as their own. My boss was trying to pass off the project that Komatsu-san submitted as his own, right under her nose. As her boss and as a member of middle management, I took the position of firmly sinking my teeth into this chaos.

“This is common in the workplace! When I was young, there were plenty of times when my boss took credit for my work, and I’ve had many far more unfair things done to me! And I endured it! I swallowed my tears for the sake of the company’s interests. Just what is it with young people these days? They lack perseverance! Do you have no respect for your superiors at all?! That’s the laid-back generation for you...”

“...As a member of society, I respect all of the achievements and accomplishments that you’ve made to this day, Section Manager Ebishima. However, no matter how much hardship you faced and how many unfair situations you had to endure...forcing that onto the younger generation is simply wrong!”

“...”

“The times are changing, Section Manager Ebishima. So much so that the laid-back generation you make fun of is now close to their thirties.” I tried to say that like it was some kind of clever one-liner, but I just ended up causing damage to myself in the process. I’ve been made fun of for being “the laid-back generation,” but now I’m pushing thirty and I’ve become middle management...

“Why you... You think you can handle this?” Section Manager Ebishima said like he was threatening me as his eyebrow twitched. Then Komatsu-san, who was sitting beside me, pulled on the hem of my suit. Her eyes were red and swollen as her tears overflowed even now.

“Chief Orihara...that’s enough. My plan doesn’t matter... It’s enough that you’ve fought for me this much...”

“We can’t give up, Komatsu-san. After all, this plan is important to you, isn’t

it?”

“I-It is, but...”

“You said so yourself, didn’t you, Komatsu-san? You said, ‘After I used our company’s products to teach my grandmother who’s a bit of a shut-in how to use makeup, she became more energetic and started going out more,’ and you said, ‘It’d be nice if grandmothers around the world could become closer to their grandchildren through makeup.’ You’re okay with having the plan you made with those feelings be taken by someone else?”

“...But Chief Orihara, at this rate, you’ll also be—”

“It’s okay. You don’t have to worry about me. Having to lay my life on the line like this is why I’m usually paid more than you.”

“Chief Orihara!” Komatsu-san said, and once again tears filled her eyes. After I passed her a handkerchief, I looked up and glanced over the entire conference room. I was going to take a stand against the bigwigs of this branch head-on.

“Everyone! I’m not only fighting out of a sense of justice or sympathy. It’s because I’m considering the interests of this company and this branch above all else that I think Komatsu-san should be at the center of this plan!”

My voice felt like it would fail me at any second, and my legs were shaking. I felt like I was going to be crushed by the countless glaring looks of these heroes who had been fighting in society for way longer than I have. However, I wasn’t going to lose. I couldn’t lose.

“This plan of ‘Cosmetics for seniors based on the concept of family connections’ was born from Komatsu-san’s love for her own grandmother. Without her, this plan will not succeed.”

I’ve decided I will fight. I will fight to protect my junior, and I will fight to keep from becoming the kind of lame adult who forces the bad habits of the older generation on young people.

“Of course, I won’t deny that Komatsu-san is still young and inexperienced. That’s why my team will give her our full support. So please, give her back the plan. Above all else, this is for the sake of this company’s best interests!” I spoke like I was protesting, or perhaps praying, and bowed deeply. Next to me,

a flustered Komatsu-san also stood up and bowed her head.

“This is ridiculous! It’s a fallacy! Prepare yourselves! The two of you will be punished accordingly—”

“Oh ho ho. How about you leave it at that?” All of a sudden, the door to the conference room opened with a clank. The person who appeared was a white-haired old man clad in tattered work clothes. He had a pure white beard around his mouth, and his expression was a gentle smile. He had a genial old man vibe, and gave you the kind of impression you’d get from a sunbathing cat.

“G-Gen-san?!” I shrieked in surprise. Gen-san—the old man who cleaned the building and who just suddenly showed up—was someone I knew very well.

It was back when I was a college student and I had started to reach the climax of my job hunt. While I was on my way to the final interview for this company, I came across Gen-san, who had injured his leg on the side of the road. Since I hurried him to the hospital, I was extremely late to the final interview. It wouldn’t have been surprising if they had turned me away at the door, but it was like there was a mysterious force at work as they made an exception and let me take the interview. After I joined the company, I found out that Gen-san worked in the area as a cleaner. Since then, we’d see each other from time to time and chat. I enjoyed talking to Gen-san because he reminded me of my dead grandfather, but...

“Why are you here, Gen-san...?”

“Oh ho ho. Hey, long time no see, Orihara-chan.”

“Who the hell are you?” Section Manager Ebishima said, glaring angrily at Gen-san. He quickly approached him, grabbed his arm, and tried to push him out of the room. “This isn’t a place for a cleaner. Hurry up and get out—”

“E-Ebishima, you idiot!” The one who yelled in a loud, shrill voice was the branch chief, Director Tanekawa. He was supposed to be the most distinguished person at this branch, yet at that moment his face was pale; he was staring at Gen-san like he was some kind of monster or demon. “D-Do...Do you know just who that man is?! That’s our company’s previous president and current chairperson, Harumi Genzaburo!”

“...What? This filthy old man is—”

“Oh ho ho. I’m sorry I’m such a filthy old man.”

“Eep!” Gen-san had a gentle smile, but he was glaring at Section Manager Ebishima with sharp eyes. Frightened, Ebishima backed up and fell on his rear. Gen-san then looked at me and gave me a familiar smile.

“Oh ho ho. I’ve heard your story, Orihara-san. It looks like I can finally pay you back for that time.”

“Gen-san...could it be...?” I was flabbergasted, so I couldn’t help shouting out, “Could it be...that the old man I took to the hospital when I had my final interview—the old man who normally works as a cleaner for this building—is actually the chairman of my company?!”

Afterwards, this and that and that and this happened. However, in short, thanks to the chairman’s god mode cheats, everything wrapped up nicely. Komatsu-san’s project would proceed as she had desired, with our team at the center of it. Also, it seemed like she had become a strong contender for promotion to regular employee status.

Wow, that sure was a surprise! Who would have thought that Gen-san was our company’s chairman?! I can’t casually call him Gen-san anymore. Though he did say, “It would make me happy if you keep calling me Gen-san. Oh ho ho.”

At any rate, the battle that I, Orihara Hime of middle management, had undertaken had finally ended. There was a huge twist at the very end, but it somehow concluded the way I wanted. I was really happy. However, more than being happy...

“Phew... I’m beat.” It was way past sundown as I made my way home from work, and I let out a deep sigh. There was a lot of post-processing after the meeting, and I lightly brushed off Gen-san when he jokingly said, “Oh ho ho. Orihara-chan, if it’s okay with you, why don’t you try working at the head office next term?” Also, I calmed down Komatsu-san, who had broken down crying as she said, “Chief Orihara, I’ll follow you for the rest of my life!” I had done a lot, and it had become late.

In the first place, I had been dealing with this issue day and night for a week

since the Obon holiday ended. It was a big relief that the problem was solved, but now that the tension was gone, my nearly thirty-year-old body was suddenly overcome with fatigue. “I’m tired, hungry, sleepy, and exhausted...”

I continued to walk like a zombie until I finally arrived at my apartment. I took my house key out of my bag, and I could feel myself quickly becoming depressed.

Sigh... Once again, I’m coming back to a dark, empty apartment. After coming home dead tired from work, no one is going to tell me “Welcome home” in this lonely, lonely castle.

Depressed, I put my key into the lock...but for some reason, it was open. When I looked closely, I could see that the lights were on.

“Huh? Wh-What is...?”

“Oh, Orihara-san. Welcome home.” Confused, I stepped into the entranceway, closed the door, and heard a very familiar voice from further inside my apartment. It was a voice I’ve been hearing every day for the last few months. Even on days when we couldn’t see each other, we’d been using apps on our phones to talk every day.

“M-Momota-kun?!” The person who came to the entranceway was Momota Kaoru-kun, my boyfriend who’s currently in high school. The difference in our age is eleven years and ten months, and unlike an adult like me, he was in the middle of enjoying his summer vacation.

“Wh-What’s wrong, Momota-kun...? Why did you come to my apartment?”

“Why? Tonight is when we were supposed to have dinner at your apartment together, isn’t it?” Momota-kun said, sounding troubled.

“Huh? Wh-What...? Wasn’t our dinner supposed to be Wednesday?”

“Today is Wednesday,” Momota-kun pointed out apologetically.

“...What?!” I said, shocked.

Oh no... I was so absorbed in my work that I totally forgot what day it was...

“Oh no! I-I’m so, so sorry... Lately I’ve been so busy with work that I’ve totally lost my sense of time...”

As I hurriedly apologized, Momota-kun kindly said, “More importantly... I’m sorry for using my spare key to just barge into your apartment. I tried to get in touch with you, but...”

“Huh? Oh... S-Sorry, I had my smartphone shut off...” I’d become so busy after turning it off for the meeting that I had forgotten to turn it back on. Now that I’d finally turned the power back on, I saw that Momota-kun tried to contact me several times.

Oh man... I’m the worst! No matter how busy I was at work, I can’t believe I blew off the promise I made with my boyfriend!

“I’m sorry... I’ll make something right away! Oh, but... I probably don’t have anything in my fridge... Oh no... Umm... I’ll hurry and go buy—”

“P-Please don’t go!” Momota-kun said and grabbed my arm as I was about to walk out the door. “The thing is...I made dinner.” After being told that, I finally realized that Momota-kun had come to the entranceway while wearing an apron and holding a ladle in his hand.

Dinner was already prepared: on the table in my room were two bowls of rice along with a bunch of grilled ginger pork and a ton of cabbage loaded onto a large plate in the middle. Overall, it was a rough and wild presentation.

“You came home at a good time, Orihara-san. I just finished making the miso soup.” Momota-kun brought the miso soup out on a tray and placed it on the table. I stood there looking at the whole scene, dumbfounded. “Um... I’m sorry for using your kitchen without asking.”

“No, that’s fine! It’s just...you really can cook, huh, Momota-kun?”

“No, I can’t cook. Truth is, all I can do is the bare minimum. I just used ginger pork seasoning for the grilled ginger pork, and I’m so bad that it took a really long time. Compared to you, Orihara-san, my cooking is nothing special,” he said modestly as he scratched his cheek in embarrassment. “You seemed really busy with work lately... I can’t give you a hand with your job, but I was wondering if there was anything else I could do... So, I tried cooking a little something for you.”

“Momota-kun...”

“I’m sorry. This is all I could think of.”

“Hey, don’t be sorry! Thank you, Momota-kun! This makes me really happy. I mean... I’m so happy I feel like I’m going to cry!”

What’s with this super happy situation? Is this utopia? Is this Momotopia? After coming home dead tired from work, my beloved boyfriend was waiting for me, and on top of that, he prepared a nice warm dinner for me!

This is bad. For a wage slave pushing thirty like me who’s been living by herself for such a long time, this attack is just too much...

“You’re going to cry? I think you’re overreacting—huh?”

By the time I realized it, I was hugging him. It was like I was throwing myself at him as I jumped onto his chest, wrapped my arms around his torso, and squeezed very tightly. Driven by the love that welled up from deep within my heart, I took the opportunity to act as spoiled as possible.

“Orihara-san?”

“Thank you, Momota-kun! I’m so happy! I’m really, really happy!”

“I-I’m glad that you’re so happy.” Momota-kun was a little taken aback by how happy I was. It seemed like he had no idea just how happy he was making me, even though I was melting from how crazy I was about him. “Good job at work, Orihara-san.”

“...Thank you, Momota-kun.” He gently hugged me and stroked my head. It may sound simple, but all of my fatigue from work was blown away.

I’m Orihara Hime. I’m twenty-seven years old, and I have a very fulfilling work life and love life.

♥Chapter 1

The Princess Wears the Uniform One Last Time

It was a holiday in August. After the hellish struggle that happened at the office after the Obon holiday, I had a day where I could relax and not worry about anything.

Also, I was dressed like a high school girl. No, you didn't read that wrong. There's probably something wrong with me as a person, but there's nothing wrong with my explanation of my current situation. Shall I say it again? On this day, in my apartment, I was dressed as a high school girl. Even though there was no one else here, I was willingly cosplaying as a high school girl.

“...”

Reflected in my mirror was a young girl wearing the uniform of the school I used to go to, Tourin Girl's High School. A blazer, knit sweater, and pleated skirt—the outfit was totally what a high school girl would wear. For a long time, I've had a complex about my baby face, so at the office I wear fake glasses to make myself look more mature, but...right now it felt like my baby face was kind of working to my advantage.

I think...I look like a high school girl. Hey, I can pull this off, right? If I went out into town dressed like this, nobody would be able to—

“No, no, no! Stop it!” I said, coming back to my senses right before I fell into a dangerous train of thought.

That was close... I was about to really step over the line there. I was about to go out into town in high school girl cosplay without any necessary reason for doing so...

“Oh man, what am I doing?” My head was in my hands as I writhed alone in agony in my room. “No, wait... There's a very good reason for this! Let me explain myself!” I said, making excuses for myself even though there was nobody else there. If I didn't, I wouldn't have been able to maintain my sense of self.

What started it all wasn't that big of a deal. I just thought that it was finally time for me to give the uniform back to its owner, Yuki-chan. It had been three months since I had first met Momota-kun on a crowded train. Due to unavoidable circumstances at the time, I was dressed as a high school girl. To be more specific...the night before, I was drinking at my friend Yuki-chan's house.

We were having a lot of fun, and as a result, Yuki-chan told me, "Hime, you really do have a baby face. You could pass for a high school girl even now, don't you think?"

I got carried away with the idea, and I ended up wearing her high school uniform that happened to be in her house. I overslept the next day, and, without even noticing what I was wearing, I ran out of her house and jumped on the train. After that, I finally realized my disastrous predicament.

Then, of all things, I had unexpectedly found myself in the desperate situation of being molested while dressed as a high school girl. However, the person who saved me was Momota-kun, who had been riding the same train. That crazy first meeting was how our relationship started.

If I weren't cosplaying as a high schooler at the time... If I had just been in my normal business suit, we probably would have just parted ways as strangers. I would have properly said thanks and bowed to the high school boy who had saved me from that train molester, and the conversation would have ended right there, I think. If I were an adult and he was a high schooler, we wouldn't have been able to easily exchange contact information. Even if it were Momota-kun, I don't think he would have looked at me with romantic interest if he knew from the beginning that I was a twenty-seven-year-old working adult.

Simply put, this uniform was the quest-giving item that started our story arc... It's not really the kind of item I want to hold on to, though.

Well, anyway, it's an important item that I have a lot of feelings about, but at the end of the day it belongs to Yuki-chan. It's the uniform that she wore in high school. Since she didn't push me to give it back to her, I've unintentionally been borrowing it this entire time. But as an adult, and as a human being, I have to give back what I've borrowed.

"I don't really need it now" is what she told me over the phone when I said I

wanted to give it back, but I decided to take it to the cleaners and return it to her. Everything up until this point was totally normal. However, the problem was...after I decided I was going to return it to her, I figured, why not try wearing it one last time? I was going to send it to the cleaners anyway.

“...That’s not really a good excuse though, is it?” I said, taking a jab at myself while I was dressed in high schooler cosplay. Even though I said the situation was complicated, I had a feeling it was surprisingly shallow.

“Phew... I’ve done it now.” Thinking it was the last time, I just had to put it on again. Over these last few months, I’d worn this uniform for one reason or another several times over, but now I was finally wearing it voluntarily without a good reason.

This twenty-seven-year-old adult is wearing a high school girl uniform for no particular reason... It’s like I’ve finally reached the point of no return.

“Oh no... This is bad... I’ve really done it! I may be making a fatal mistake in my life...”

Even though the room’s air conditioner was running, my body was covered in sweat. My body temperature was quickly rising from my insecurity and anxiety.

Now, just why was I panicking so much? The answer is really simple: while I was in this state, I called Momota-kun over, and he would be arriving any minute. I was having intense feelings of regret from my simple actions taken on a whim.

What am I going to do? I guess I was wrong after all? I was planning to surprise him by wearing this uniform, but...is he just going to cringe at me?! Is he going to think “Yeesh, this woman’s finally worn it on her own”?!

“Oh no, I wonder if I really did mess up... I wonder if I really am wrong!” I didn’t really have a deep reason for doing it. I just kind of wanted to make a surprise joke.

It was definitely going too far, but it was for the sake of making memories. I wanted us to get lost in the memories of the time when we first met, and I wanted us to make new memories together. I was probably never going to wear this uniform again, so I wanted him to see me looking like a high school girl for

the last time in my life.

“I wonder what Momota-kun would say if I opened the door dressed like this?”

If he laughed at me... I'd actually prefer that. If he could simply laugh and say, "Hey, what are you doing, Orihara-san?" then I could simply say back, "He he he, I just wanted to wear it a little. It brings back memories, right?" However, if he were taken aback and just stared at me, then I feel like I would probably break down right there and cry. If he looked at me like "What is this woman doing at her age?" then I probably couldn't recover from that...

Or maybe there's a chance that he'll be really happy! There's a possibility that Momota-kun has the kind of special fetish where he thinks "Ha ha... A woman her age struggling to pull off a cosplay of a high school girl is totally hot!" ...No, that's probably not the case here...

While I was being anxious and delirious, a lot of time had apparently passed, and my doorbell rang.

It looks like he's here! Momota-kun has arrived!

My heart beat fast, and I instantly became tense, but...

“All right!” I patted my cheeks and got psyched up.

I have to do this. If I've come this far, I have to do this. There's no time to change and there's no going back. At this point, I just have to give it my all. In the first place, what's most embarrassing in situations like this is being shy about it. I've seen it time and again at my company's year-end parties: a young employee will do a popular gag while embarrassed, and it just makes you feel sorry for them. Being shy and doing something half-heartedly is what's most embarrassing.

Determined, I reached the door of my apartment, and before opening it I looked at the doorknob.

As I opened the door, I went full throttle and said, “Tada! It's me, Orihara Hime! I'm a fresh, young fifteen-year-old!”

I did it! I went through with it! I left behind my shame, my hesitation, and my

pride and went through with it. I'm Orihara Hime, twenty-seven years old, and I made that joke with all my might!

All right...I-let's see how it goes?! Did I stick the landing, or did I crash and burn? Did he like it, or did he think it was cringey? Please, don't shut the door and just go home!

I was desperately thinking that in my mind when I finally realized what was happening.



It seemed that my brain had overheated from the pressure of making that joke, and I temporarily couldn't register the image my retina was sending me. After a time lag of a few seconds, I could clearly see who my guest was.

"H-Hime-chan...?"

"...Huh. Onee-chan?" The person in front of the door when I opened it was...my older sister, Orihara Kisaki. She was thirty-four years old, a one-time divorcee, living with my parents after returning home, and currently working irregular hours at a snack pub in my hometown. She sometimes shows up to my apartment without warning, and every time, I tell her, "Call me in advance." But she never listens, and she'd done it again...with the worst possible timing.

"Hime...chan. Y-You..." She was taken aback, and her face was pale. My sister looked super uncomfortable after she had just witnessed her little sister, who was going to be twenty-eight this year, making a ruckus while cosplaying as a high school girl. Also, since I had just been seen by a family member while doing my best gag in high schooler cosplay, I too was super embarrassed.

What's going on here? Just what is this situation? What did I do in a past life to deserve this? Could someone please kill me right now?

"..."

"Aah?! W-Wait, Onee-chan! Don't shut the door! Don't just try to leave without saying anything! It's not what you think! It's just, um..."

"Huh? Kisaki-san?" I was desperately trying to keep my sister from leaving when, after all this time, Momota-kun showed up. After he looked at my sister in surprise...he looked at me in my high school girl cosplay, and he had an indescribably puzzled expression on his face. It was as if the look of dismay and depression on his face was meant to say, "She's done something awkward at an awkward time and created an awkward situation again..."

I meant to make one last good memory by wearing this uniform, but it seems that I've only created a new dark memory...

Presently, I was sitting upright on my heels solemnly. We were in the middle of my apartment, and although we weren't ordered to do so, Momota-kun and I voluntarily sat that way next to each other, as if we were being overwhelmed

by the awkward atmosphere. My sister sat across from us with an intense look of confusion on her face. She was rubbing her brow like she had a headache.

Eventually, at the end of a heavy silence, she said, "...It's not like I'm upset, you know? Hime-chan, you're an adult, and I'm not going to nag you about it. You're a grown adult who can take responsibility for herself and make her own decisions. However," she continued in a kind tone, "I think it's best for you to refrain from...these kinds of kinky games in the middle of the day."

"...!"

Oh no, she really does have it all wrong... She thinks I was wearing a high school girl cosplay for sex! Well...I can't blame her. If you just looked at the situation, you wouldn't think it was anything else.

"Before, you...did the same thing with buruma, right? I mean...I'm not saying that it's anything bad, okay? It's just, you guys are each other's first boyfriend and girlfriend, so...I think that you guys should just try some more normal things. Wouldn't it be better if you guys became a little more advanced before you try those particular kinds of things?"

"..."

This is rough. I'm being seriously lectured by a family member about my sexual hobbies. It's even worse that she's not ranting and raving at me but actually making a good argument...

I wanted to object, but I couldn't think of anything. To my sister who didn't know about how Momota-kun and I had really met, all she knew was that her little sister was waiting for her boyfriend in her apartment while cosplaying as a high school girl. To clear up the misunderstanding, I would have to reveal everything in detail, and, of course, I couldn't do that. My older sister still thought that Momota-kun was a twenty-five-year-old adult.

As I was unable to say anything and silently faced the floor, Momota-kun spoke up from my side and said, "...Please don't blame Orihara-san. It's...my fault." For a second, he appeared conflicted, but with a look of determination he said, "I asked her to do it. I asked Orihara-san to dress like a high school girl."

"...?!"

You're joking, right? Momota-kun...you're going to cover for me in this situation? I'm totally to blame for this situation, but still you'll protect me? To protect your foolish girlfriend, you'll take on the stigma of being a pervert? Y-You're so manly...! Oh wow, my boyfriend is just too cool!

"It's true... Momota-kun was the one who first suggested it."

"...Yes, I am."

"If that's the case...then there's probably no helping it. Apparently, a lot of guys are into that kind of thing." My big sister accepted it without question. I felt like her tolerance as an adult woman was working in the wrong direction. "So, you like uniforms after all, Momota-kun?"

"Yes...it's like I'm regaining my lost youth. When I look at those costumes, which are a kind of sanctuary that only teenage girls can wear, I feel like I've become a teenager again and have the vitality I did at that time... I think..." He was doing his best to imagine what someone with a uniform fetish would say.

Well, there's no way he'd know. After all, Momota-kun is an energetic teenager. He hasn't lost his youth because he's right in the middle of it. Also, he sees girls wearing uniforms at his school every day.

"...I see. So, for men, high school girls...really are something special," my sister said, being surprisingly understanding. Her eyes were gazing somewhere far off in the distance. "I wonder...if I should have dressed up as a high school girl at least once for him..."

"Huh?"

"I thought he was joking and didn't take it seriously...but, looking back, our marital troubles probably started from those kinds of daily misunderstandings. Back then, if I had just worn a school uniform, things may have been different —"

"Um, Kisaki-san?"

"—What?! Oh! It's nothing! A-Anyway, no matter how in love you are, I don't think it's okay to do anything too kinky!" My one-time divorcee sister shouted in an attempt to hide how embarrassed she was after she returned from her momentary flashback. Then, after letting out a deep sigh, she said, "Hime-chan,

how about you go and get changed?”

“Y-Yeah... U-Um, Onee-chan. Momota-kun isn’t to blame. The truth is I—”

“Just hurry up and get changed! I can’t talk right with you dressed like that.” I tried to clear my boyfriend’s name, but my sister was too fed up to listen to me, and I was pushed into the changing room without being able to explain myself.

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Since Orihara-san had headed to the changing room, it was just Kisaki-san and me alone together. In terms of my mental state, I was way beyond embarrassed.

Just what will Orihara-san’s sister do now that she thinks I’m a pervert who forced her little sister to do kinky stuff in a school uniform? Will she be angry, resent me, or reject me outright and tell me to break up with her little sister?

I trembled with fear, but Kisaki-san smiled and said, “You don’t have to be so nervous, Momota-kun. I’m sure Hime-chan did it on her own, right?”

“Huh?”

“You didn’t know anything about it all, but to quickly cover for Hime-chan you told a lie. Am I wrong?”

“You knew?”

“I could tell by the way you two were acting,” Kisaki-san said, giving a tired smile. It seemed that she saw through my lie from the very beginning. “Geez... Hime-chan’s tendency to lose control is such a pain. I wonder if she was trying to make you happy by wearing that uniform?”

“...Ha ha ha” I gave a vague laugh, but the truth is I kind of knew why Orihara-san wore the uniform. That uniform is the quest-giving item that started our story arc. It’s not really the kind of item I want to hold onto, but if it weren’t for that costume, I don’t think we would have started dating. I think her greeting me while dressed up in that was probably her way of surprising me. She probably wanted to make me happy and share our memories together. I was somehow able to imagine her feelings, so without hesitation I covered for her. Although the main reason I did it was because it was too painful to watch her

after she had been seen cosplaying in a school uniform by her sister...

“She’s usually a quiet, reserved, and cautious girl, but when her switch is flipped, she stops being able to see what’s going on around her.”

“Well, that’s...”

Hmm. I can’t deny that. I mean, I think that part of her is cute.

“There was a part of me that was worried she’d get carried away with having a boyfriend for the first time in her life and that she’d go out of control, but...with a splendid boyfriend like you, Momota-kun, I’m sure Hime-chan will be fine. I’m sorry that she’s so unreliable even though she’s older.”

“...No.” I faced down and shook my head. I couldn’t look directly at her eyes full of trust. “I’m...not the kind of boyfriend who deserves to be praised by you.” I wasn’t trying to be humble; I really thought that from the bottom of my heart.

The reason Kisasi-san is able to call me a “splendid boyfriend” is because she thinks I’m a twenty-five-year-old adult. The truth is I’m a fifteen-year-old student. I’m not a good match for someone like Orihara-san, who works hard every day at a prestigious company. I’m not the kind of boyfriend who could get her family’s approval—

“—Her name,” Kisasi-san said as I was sinking in my dark thoughts.

“What?”

“No, it’s no big deal, but... Momota-kun, you still call Hime-chan by her last name, even though you call me by my first name.”

“That’s because, well... It’s complicated.”

The reason I called Kisasi-san by her first name was simple. It was because if I called her by her last name, it would overlap with Orihara-san. I felt slightly apprehensive about suddenly calling someone who was almost twenty years older than me by their first name, but I didn’t know what else to call her. The reason I continued to call Orihara-san “Orihara-san” was...

“Since we first met, I always added ‘-san’ to her name, and somehow I missed the right time to change that. Also, it seems like Orihara-san doesn’t like to be

called by her first name in public.”

“Oh, that’s right. It’s because Hime doesn’t really like her name, huh?” Kisaki-san nodded in acceptance. “I thought that maybe it was something romantic, like the two of you call each other by your names only when you’re alone, but I guess that’s not the case.”

“...No, it’s not that.” Honestly, I thought a few times about calling her by her first name, but I’d come this far without being able to make a move.

I don’t know why, but “Orihara-san” just feels so right to me. However, one day I’d like to try calling her by her first name—

“Well, I was the one who asked you, but everyone has their own way of addressing their partner. I have some friends who still call their spouse by their last name even though they’re married.” Kisaki-san tried to cheer me up, perhaps because my worries were showing on my face. It was at that moment that Orihara-san had finished switching clothes and emerged from the changing room.

“By the way, just what did you come here for, Onee-chan?” Orihara-san said with a dubious look as she turned her gaze to the suitcase that Kisaki-san had brought with her. “Could it be that you’re planning on staying here for a while again?”

“Yeah. I thought maybe I’d stay over for a little while.”

“What? You were just here about a month ago...”

“You don’t need to be so cold. I’ll pay for living expenses, and you don’t have to worry: I won’t get in the way of you two being all lovey-dovey.” Kisaki-san then made a nasty face and whispered into Orihara-san’s ear, “You can relax. Whenever Momota-kun comes to sleep over, I’ll just go stay over somewhere else.”

“S-Sleep over?! I wasn’t talking about that kind of thing!” Orihara-san’s face turned red, and Kisaki-san smirked.

“Geez... did you have plans to hang out with your friends again?”

“No, it’s not like that...”

“Huh? Well then why? You usually stay at my house because you have friends here.”

“Well...it doesn't matter!” After diverting her eyes, Kisaki-san forcefully ended the conversation. “Now, it's time to get ready for dinner! Momota-kun, since you're here, why don't you go ahead and eat too?” she said to change the subject.

“...I'm the one who has to cook though.”

“Yes. Please do, Hime.” Kisaki-san said it like it was a matter of fact. Orihara-san looked at her with a disgruntled expression, but she didn't talk back to her and gave a small sigh.

“Fine... I'll go shopping. I don't have enough to make a meal for three.”

“Oh. I'll go too,” I said. Orihara-san grabbed her bag and the key to her car, and the two of us left her apartment.

As we were going down the stairs, Orihara-san said, “I'm sorry, Momota-kun...” sounding very apologetic. “My sister thinks you're a pervert with a uniform fetish because of me...”

“It's okay. It seems like Kisaki-san knew it was a lie.”

“Huh? R-Really?!”

“Yes.”

“Then, Onee-chan...was just annoyed that her little sister had another weird outburst?!”

“...Yes.”

“Oh man, oh geez... It's not even true! I had a good reason for it...” After she became really depressed, Orihara-san stared at me. “U-Um, Momota-kun! It's not like I've awakened to some kind of uniform hobby, okay? There's a complicated reason for it! Since I was going to send the uniform to the cleaners before I gave it back to Yuki-chan, I figured I'd try it on one more time before then, and... Oh no, that's not it! That just makes it sound like I'm some kind of pervert who was wearing it voluntarily, doesn't it?! That's not what happened —”

“I-It’s okay, you don’t have to make those kinds of excuses,” I said to Orihara-san as she panicked. “I understand. You were trying to let me see you the way you looked when we first met, right?”

“Y-Yeah.”

“Thank you. I’m happy that I got to see you in a high school girl uniform again.”

“Huh?”

“...Oh, no, I didn’t mean anything weird by that! I just meant that it was nostalgic!”

“Th-That’s right! I-I understand what you mean!” After she nodded while looking flustered, she gave a small laugh. “You’re amazing, Momota-kun. You know everything about me.”

“...I *am* your boyfriend after all.”

Orihara-san laughed. “He he. That’s right.”

After descending the staircase, we made our way to the parking lot behind the apartment building. Right as we were about to get into Orihara’s beloved car, the Nissan Cube Cu-chan, Orihara-san said, “Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot my wallet. I left it in the other bag I use when I go to work and not this one.”

“Okay, then I’ll go and get it.”

“Sorry. I’ll go ahead and start the car.” I turned around and went back the way I came. I went up the stairs again and made my way to Orihara-san’s apartment. I opened the door, took off my shoes, walked through the hallway, and, as I was about to open the door to the living room...

“...H-Huh? That’s strange. This can’t be...” I could hear Kisaki-san’s voice coming from inside the living room. “You’ve gotta be kidding me! I can’t believe Hime-chan could fit in this but I can’t... Ngh!” She sounded like she was in the midst of some dire circumstances.

I thought she must be exercising or something as I opened the door and said, “I’m sorry, I forgot something—”

I was shocked. I was so shocked I thought I’d pass out. In the living room,

Kisaki-san was...wearing a high school girl uniform. It was the one that Orihara-san had just taken off.

No. Strictly speaking, she wasn't exactly *wearing* it. It seemed like she couldn't get the skirt's hooks to fasten, so she was doing her best to suck in her stomach while she held down the skirt's hooks with both her hands. As for the chest area, her full breasts pushed up the fabric of her shirt from the inside, making it look like the buttons would pop off at any second. How should I say this...on the whole, things were being pushed to their limit.

Right now, a thirty-four-year-old divorcee was trying to wear a high school girl uniform. Orihara-san, with her baby face, looked so good in a school uniform that you could mistake her for a real high school girl. Kisaki-san, however, didn't look quite so young. Of course, she was beautiful and pretty and looked younger than her real age, but she didn't look like a teenager. And so, no matter how you looked at it, in front of me was just a thirty-four-year-old woman who was trying so hard to force herself into a schoolgirl uniform that it looked regrettable and cruel.

"What? Eeek! M-Momota-kun?!"

"..."

"Ah! W-Wait! I-It's a misunderstanding! This is just a figment of your imagination... Hey, wait! Don't just leave without saying anything!"



I didn't say anything. I didn't show any reaction at all. I just took Orihara-san's bag for going to work and ran out of the living room. I couldn't do anything aside from that.

Yeah. I'll just pretend I didn't see that. Later, the three of us are probably going to eat dinner together, but I'll just act like nothing happened. I saw nothing, nothing at all. Phew, this year's summer sure is hot...

And so it was that Kisaki-san came to town one day in August.

♥Chapter 2

The Princesses' Banquet

“And without further ado, let’s get this girls’ party started. Cheers!” As it was my apartment, I gave a rough greeting, and the three of us toasted.

It was an evening in August when Yuki-chan, my sister, and I were having an all-girls party in my apartment. It was originally just going to be Yuki-chan and I drinking together, but when I told her that my sister was staying at my house, we decided to drink with all three of us.

“At this age, you can’t really call us ‘girls’ anymore, can you?” Yuki-chan said with a self-deprecating smile. In her hand was a cup of Japanese sake called Adatara Ginjo, which came from the city of Nihonmatsu in the Fukushima prefecture. I don’t really know much about it, but I’ve heard it’s a pretty famous drink that won a top prize in an international competition. As best friends, Yuki-chan and I decided we should each just bring our own food and drinks, and Yuki came with a whole bottle of sake.

Just how much does she plan on drinking?

“He he he. It’s fine isn’t it, Yuki-chan? Women are girls at heart, no matter how old they become,” my sister said, smiling and with a glass in one hand. She was drinking a Cassis Orange cocktail mixed with orange juice and mixed again with mineral water. Even though she works irregularly at a snack pub, the truth is she’s super weak to alcohol. At her job, not even a single drop of alcohol touches her lips. However, when she’s with friends, she makes really watered-down drinks like this for herself.

“That’s right, Yuki-chan. Being in your twenties still totally counts as being a girl—oh. I’m sorry, Onee-chan...”

“Uh, Hime-chan? I wasn’t worried about it, so could you maybe not apologize? I was just going to ignore your comment, but that face you made when you said ‘oh’ coupled with your apology really twists the knife.”

As soon as the party started, my big sister, the only one among us in her

thirties and born in the eighties, was deeply wounded. I was feeling a little guilty, so I brought my glass of Cassis Orange to my lips. I'm not quite as much of a lightweight as Onee-chan, so mine was a normal, not watered-down version.

Lined up on the table were things like cold tofu with toppings, nuts, karaage, salted squid, smoked cheese, Levain crackers, and all kinds of snacks that we brought ourselves. Incidentally, my favorite snack is smoked daikon radish pickles with cream cheese. The smokey flavor of the pickles and the rich flavor of the cream cheese are a match made in heaven! If you put this combination on a Levain cracker, it becomes an awesome trinity! I love it so much that I could eat it every day even without alcohol... But yeah, it's the kind of snack where you shouldn't think about the calories.

"Still, it's been a long time since I last saw you, hasn't it, Kisaki-san?"

"That's true. It's been about three years, I think?" Yuki-chan and my sister were thoroughly enjoying their reunion. My sister used to drop me off and pick me up from high school by car a lot, and that's how the two of them got to know each other. After becoming adults, the three of us would do things like go out to eat together, albeit very rarely.

"Is your son already walking?"

"Yes, though he's just waddling around. He still isn't able to keep his balance and falls down easily, so I can't take my eyes off of him."

"I see. So your husband is watching him today?"

"I asked him to. Even though I'm a housewife, I want time to drink with my friends at least once a month," she said, neither ashamed nor proud, as if she was just relaying the truth. As a fellow woman, I thought being a housewife as a job was cool.

"It's strange. It feels like it was just yesterday that you were my little sister's high school kid friend, but now you have a child and you're a great mother. Time really does fly," my sister said, and she shot me a mischievous look. "I mean, even Hime-chan finally has a boyfriend now."

"H-Hey, hold on, Onee-chan... What do you mean by 'even Hime-chan'?"

“I mean, I thought it would be impossible for you to get a boyfriend. On your days off, you just play video games, you don’t have any guy friends, and you’re not the type to be proactive... Mom and I used to always talk about how we had to somehow find you someone nice, you know?”

“H-How rude!” I was crushed, but I couldn’t make a strong comeback. In fact, I think my being able to date Momota-kun is a miracle on top of a miracle. If I hadn’t met him in May of this year, I feel like my weekdays would have just been me going back and forth between my office, and I would have spent my weekends just playing video games. I could understand why my mom and older sister had been worried.

“You used to be so ungirly, and now you have a wonderful boyfriend.”

“Y-Yeah, Momota-kun sure is wonderful.”

“I don’t really know much about it, but the IT business seems amazing.”

“Y-You’re right...”

“Mom also said, ‘IT seems amazing.’”

“Yeah... The IT business sure seems amazing...”

As we continued our silly back and forth, I cast my gaze at Yuki-chan. Understanding the situation, she nodded her head at me as if to say, “I get it, I get it. I’ll play along.”

I still hadn’t been able to tell my sister and mom the truth about my very first boyfriend being a fifteen-year-old high school boy. To my sister and mother, Momota-kun was a twenty-five-year-old adult—and he was also the rising young star of a listed IT company, and everyone had high expectations for his future.

I felt bad for laying it on so thick about him. Luckily, the Orihara family’s knowledge of the IT business didn’t go beyond “IT seems amazing,” so the issue wasn’t pursued too deeply.

“By the way, how’s it been lately, Hime-chan?”

“W-What do you mean by ‘it’?”

“I mean Momota-kun, of course. Are you guys getting along well?”

“Well, probably. We don’t argue, and we’ve been enjoying dating.”

“Hmm. That’s not what I meant, he he he. Well, that’s fine. Let’s leave that kind of deep conversation for a little later in the evening.” My sister smiled suggestively and tilted her glass seductively. Her gesture was sexy, but since she was drinking a Cassis Orange that was basically orange juice, she wasn’t really sticking the landing.

“That’s right. I also wanted to have some deep conversation with you, Hime.” Yuki-chan smiled and refilled her glass with sake. The way she expertly poured her drink from the bottle gave her the air of a seasoned heavy drinker.

“G-Go easy on me...” I said meekly and took a sip of my Cassis Orange.

Our all-girls (around thirty) party had begun in such a fashion, but the conversation inevitably turned to romance. It all started with a nice warm-up conversation about “What kind of guy is your type?”

“Someone who’s smart,” Yuki-chan declared resolutely. “Not like book smarts, but like, brightness or common sense. I like guys who give off an intelligent vibe.”

“That checks out. Your husband is totally like that,” I pointed out. I knew most of her exes, and every one of them seemed really knowledgeable. It appeared that Yuki-chan couldn’t really get along with someone who isn’t smart. “How about you, Onee-chan?”

“Well...” After giving it some thought, my sister said, “Someone who doesn’t cheat, maybe?” with a self-mocking smile.

“...” Yuki-chan and I went quiet at the same time.

Yeesh, that’s heavy. It’s even worse when someone who got a divorce over cheating says it.

“How about you, Hime?” Yuki-chan said as she tried to lighten the mood and passed the question to me.

“Me? I don’t think I have a type.” I’d never really thought about that kind of thing. I had characters and Kamen Rider actors that I liked, but it’s not like I ever wanted to date any of them. “If I have to pick a type, I guess I like guys who are

tall.”

“Hmm. Is that so?”

“No, I’m not talking about Momota-kun!” Yuki-chan was looking at me knowingly, so I denied it in a panic. As I did that, my sister also looked at me with a grin.

“Momota-kun’s really got it going on with how manly he is. He’s so tall and he’s got those broad shoulders.”

“I-I’m not talking about... Well...that is true.” I had to accept it. It is true after all. I mean...he’s so attractive! He’s tall and he has a nice build, a big chest, broad shoulders, and big, defined hands. Overall, he’s just so masculine that it really hits the mark for me.

“Hmm. Maybe our preferences are so similar because we’re sisters, Hime? I’m more into well-built guys than skinny guys. However, I’m a little surprised.”

“Huh? What’s surprising?”

“The fact that your boyfriend is younger. I just kind of thought that if you were ever able to get a boyfriend, it would be someone older.”

“R-Really? Why?”

“Hmm, I wonder why? It’s not like I have a solid reason. I kind of just thought someone older would be a better match for you. I also just assumed that you preferred older guys to younger guys.”

I thought a little bit about what my type was before I met Momota-kun. “Now that you mention it, I probably did like older guys...”

I never really thought about what kind of person my type was, but I fantasized as much as the next person: I imagined things like a life with a fantasy boyfriend, my ideal situation for being proposed to, married life with a fantasy husband—you know, the kinds of things that you can’t really tell people about. It’s not like I thought that hard about the details, but...I get the feeling that my fantasy boyfriends were always older than me.

“Yeah, that’s usually how it is,” Yuki-chan said while letting out a small sigh. “It’s pretty common for the person you fall in love with to not be ‘your type.’”

That's right. It's not like Momota-kun isn't my type...but I kind of can't believe it. If I told myself last year that my very first boyfriend would be a high schooler who's twelve years younger than me, my eyes probably would have gone wide with shock.

The next topic went a little deeper: "How do you feel about cheating?"

"Hey, you two, when do you think cheating starts?" my sister asked. Thanks to my sister saying that her type was "guys who don't cheat," it seemed like delving into those kinds of questions would be taboo, but, surprisingly, she was the one to instigate it.

"I-I don't really know..."

"For example, Hime-chan, if you were told 'My female friend and I are going to hang out,' would you be okay with that?"

"Hmm... I probably wouldn't."

Well, the truth is I had been before. During that incident with Ibusuki-san, I gave Momota-kun permission to have a date with her at that amusement park. The circumstances being what they were, I thought that there was no getting around it, but it still wasn't a good feeling. I was so anxious that it felt like my heart was going to be crushed. Honestly, I wanted him to knock that kind of thing off from now on.

"It'd be okay if he was going with a big group of people, but if it was just the two of them, I don't know..." I continued.

"For me, it would depend on what they were doing," Yuki-chan said. "As a wife, I'd like them to refrain from things like traveling or staying somewhere overnight, but if the two of them are just going to get something to eat or going to see a movie together, I'm not going to complain about it."

"Oh, really? You'd hate it if they went to see a movie together, wouldn't you? That's practically cheating, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't like it if he kept it a secret from me, but if I were told about it beforehand, I wouldn't particularly mind. Even as a husband and wife, I don't think we should meddle in each other's relationships with friends and acquaintances."

“Oh, I see,” I said, impressed by her mature words.

Then my sister began to chuckle. “...Heh. He he he. Yeah, when I was married, I had the same stance as Yuki-chan. I thought I would be easy-going and that we would respect each other’s freedom and rights without being overly intrusive... But the truth is, I’m not that strong a woman.”

She continued to speak as a deep sadness entered her voice. “I tried not to worry about what my husband did with anyone. Even if his ‘company drinking parties’ and ‘unusual overtime’ kept happening, I thought I’d believe him without question. I didn’t want to be thought of as some controlling, horrible wife... I wanted to be thought of as a wife that was generous and understanding. However, the result was my husband cheating on me without hesitation.”

Yuki-chan and I were silent.

“On top of that, the person he was cheating on me with...was someone younger, daintier, and slenderer than I am. That hurt... Him cheating on me with someone who’s the complete opposite of me was way more painful than him cheating on me with just anybody.”

The two of us couldn’t say anything. I felt like I wanted to tell her to not get so depressed over a topic that she brought up herself, but there was a darkness there that I was afraid to approach. Since my sister seemed like she’d fall into endless sadness, the topic was forcefully ended.

After a short break, we moved onto a topic unrelated to love: “How has work been lately?”

“It was the worst... I thought I was going to die...” I said, letting out a deep sigh.

“Hime really has been having a hard time lately. She fought her upper management just like *Hanazawa Naoki* all by herself.”

“I think I worked really hard! I was like the main character of a corporate TV drama, the way I fought with my boss! I was trying so hard to look cool in front of my subordinate, but I was so nervous I felt like I was going to die the whole time! Yuki-chan, praise me! I worked really hard, so praise me!”

“Yes, yes, you worked really hard. I’m so proud of you.” I flopped onto and hugged Yuki-chan as she gave me shallow praise.

“Oh, so you really have been working hard,” my sister said sincerely. “When you were searching for work, you would say things like ‘If there’s little overtime and a lot of time off, anywhere is fine’ and ‘My priority is securing time to play video games.’ Now what do you know, you’ve become a respectable member of society.”

“...Well, that’s because I’m twenty-seven years old now,” I pouted, sounding a little embarrassed.

“By the way, Hime-chan, how about Momota-kun?”

“What about him?”

“His job. Is it going well?”

“...Oh, um, yeah, it’s probably going well, I think. Lately, um, it seems like he’s been programming something.”

“Programming, huh... Yeah, I know what you mean about programming. Even I understand that much. It’s like...something that has to do with a program, right?”

“That’s right. Um... Also, lately, it looks like he’s been c-computering.”

“Oh... Yeah. Computering, right. Yeah, I totally get that. It’s that thing, right? That...really important thing.”

“Y-Yeah, that really important thing.” I desperately tried to use my shallow knowledge to fool my sister, who was pretending to understand because she had less knowledge than me. All the while, Yuki-chan gave me a cold look, as if to say, “It’s amazing you’ve managed to make it so far like this.”

After another break, the topic was: “Where did you go this summer?”

“Did you go somewhere this summer, Hime? Like, to the mountains or the ocean?”

“Um... Well, I took a kind of camping trip to the mountains.”

“Now that you mention it, you did come home once to borrow our car. Didn’t

you say you went with some people from work?”

“Y-Yeah. I went with some people from work...” After I said that to my sister, I gave Yuki-chan a look, and she gave me a look back that said, “Yeah, yeah, I’ll play along.” There was no way that I could tell the truth: that I went camping with a group of high schoolers and played the role of the old lady chaperone. “It’d been a long time since I went camping, and I had a lot of fun. I wore a swimsuit and went playing in a river, so it was like I was able to enjoy the mountains and the ocean at the same time.”

“Is that right? But Hime, do you even own a swimsuit?”

“E-Excuse you... Even I own a s-swimsuit—”

“We bought it together.”

“Y-Yuki-chan...” Just as I was trying to fool my sister, I felt like I was stabbed from behind.

“Oh, really? If Yuki-chan went with you, then I can rest at ease. If it was just you by yourself, Hime-chan, there’s no telling what kind of swimsuit you’d buy.”

“We chose something that properly suited Hime.”

“Yeah. Right,” I said without thinking to a calm-looking Yuki-chan.

“What? I chose a cute one for you, didn’t I?”

“Yeah... It was a really good one. I think the last one you chose for me was really good. But you really enjoyed playing around with all the ones before that, didn’t you?!” In the back of my mind, my memory of my humiliation in the swimsuit section was revived. “The eyepatch-style bikini and the monokini were really revealing, so I could understand why you chose them, but you were just messing with me with the school swimsuit and the seashell bikini, weren’t you?!”

“I mean, you’ll put on anything I ask you to, so I wanted to know just how much I could get you to wear. Still... I didn’t think that you’d actually wear that seashell bikini.”

“You’re terrible! I was so desperate, and I was depending on you!”

“Don’t pout. I’m sorry I played with you,” Yuki-chan apologized.

Well, to be honest, I wasn't really mad. I made some good memories with the final swimsuit she chose, so I have nothing but gratitude toward her now. I did have that embarrassing accident where the swimsuit came undone and my boobs were exposed, though... If I were wearing a school swimsuit, that kind of accident probably wouldn't have happened, but...at my age, a school swimsuit is the last thing I should be wearing.

Finally, after an hour had passed since our girls' party had started and everyone had had enough to drink, the topic of our discussion became more mature.

"Hey, Hime-chan, Yuki-chan..." my sister said with glassy eyes and an oddly persistent voice. She should have been drinking only extremely watered-down drinks, yet it still seemed like the alcohol had built up in her system since she looked pretty drunk. "Frankly speaking...have you been having sex lately?"

"Huh?!" I did a spit take with my drink. The expression on Yuki-chan's face didn't change, but for a moment her eyebrow twitched. Though not as much as I was, she was a little shaken.

"Wh-What are you saying, Onee-chan?"

"What? Why not? Let's finally have a deep conversation. He he he," she laughed charmingly and drew her body closer. "How about it, Hime-chan? Tell your big sister. When was the last time you did it with Momota-kun?"

"Th-The last time... We haven't even had a first time..."

"I thought so. You guys still haven't done anything."

"..."

Crap, she got me. If she'd started out with something like "Have you done it yet?" I might have been able to dodge the question, but she loaded her question with the premise that I'd already done it, so I couldn't help but object.

"He he. It's just as I predicted. It looks like you two are taking your time and nurturing your love. You're like middle schoolers. It's so cute!"

"And what's wrong with that?! We have our own pace!"

"I'm not going to criticize you two's relationship... But I'll feel sorry for

Momota-kun if you keep taking it easy.”

“What?”

“He’s really patient, isn’t he? Honestly, he’s probably thinking he wants to do it with you right now.”

“I-I wonder if that’s true?”

“Of course it is! Momota-kun is a young man. He may seem selfless, but just beneath the surface, he’s like an animal. Twenty-five-year-old men are the embodiment of lust,” my sister declared. Her words sounded pretty real. If a twenty-five-year-old man is the embodiment of lust...then what does that make a fifteen-year-old boy?

“He hasn’t made a move even though he’s dating you and he’s been shown those boobs up close. Momota-kun sure is something. He’s like a monster of selflessness and kindness,” Yuki-chan said like she was over it.

A monster of sincerity and kindness? Is she praising him or speaking ill of him?

“But sometimes that restraint is a sin too, right? Hime, the truth is you want him to take you right now, don’t you?”

“What?!”

“Oh, bull’s eye?”

“N-No, no! It’s not like I...” The two of them looked at me gleefully as I became too embarrassed to speak.

“I knew Hime was kind of pent up.”

“That’s true. Until this year, Hime-chan hasn’t had a boyfriend. Her fantasies must be pretty wild.”

“Momota-kun doesn’t seem to have that kind of experience either.”

“Yeah, Momota-kun’s so cute. He seems so naive and simple. Just thinking about how cute these two are makes my heart flutter. I wonder what their first time is going to be like...”

“Oh, come on! Shut up!” I shouted, unable to take it anymore. “We don’t need to talk about me anymore! Leave me alone!”

“Okay, okay. I’m sorry for making fun of you,” my sister said and caressed my head. She then turned to Yuki-chan. “How about you, Yuki-chan? How have things been with you and your husband lately?”

“...” Having been asked such a private question, the smile that Yuki-chan had while making fun of me disappeared. Her face became stiff, and she gulped down the rest of the sake in her cup. “To be honest...we haven’t been having sex,” she said with a deep sigh. “After our son was born, it became very rare. It’s not like we don’t do it at all, it’s just that mostly I’m the one who initiates it...”

“Oh, I see. A lot of couples do become like that after they have a child,” my sister said, sounding somewhat lonely. “We never had a child, but... around the time things ended, it was a completely sexless marriage. Even though I was the one to approach him, a lot of times I’d be turned down... It’s such a crushing feeling of defeat getting turned down by the person you married.”

“It feels like I’ve lost my sense of worth as a woman... And to think it was a pain how many guys were after me when I was younger...”

“Yeah, totally! For the longest time, I was like, ‘Why do guys only think about sex?’ but here I am now, feeling depressed about getting turned down.”

I was completely unable to keep up with the real talk of a married woman and a divorcee, so I just sat there and listened in silence. *Th-This conversation is amazing. These two were super popular and had a steady stream of boyfriends when they were students; they’re from a completely different world from an introvert like me.*

Gradually this conversation from another world got even deeper.

“I think it’s called ‘pushing rope’? Lately, it’s been happening to my husband.”

“Yuki-chan, your husband is twelve years older than you, right? In that case, there’s no getting around it. Some things just come with age.”

“I know it’s just a fact of life, but... I don’t know how to deal with it. I feel like if I try to cheer him up, I’ll just hurt his feelings even more.”

“Yeah, you’re right. It’s a shock to the man too. There were times with my ex-husband where things ended without him getting hard, and it was awkward for

the both of us.”

“I wonder if a guy’s sex drive really does peak around his teens and his twenties and then declines from there?”

“Hmm, I think that’s not necessarily true? I think that it varies from person to person. For example, the person I did it with recently was close to his forties, but he was really rough and intense like he was still in his twenties—”

“Recently?” I said, unable to resist picking up on this single word from their other-worldly conversation.

“Oops.” My sister covered her mouth.

“U-Um.”

“Onee-chan... When did you find someone like that?”

“Th-The truth is...I’ve met someone kind of nice,” she said, seeming embarrassed yet a little happy.

“I see. You should have told me! Is he from around our town?”

“No, he’s not. He’s actually from around here...”

“Around here? Oh... Then does that mean that the reason you’re staying at my house right now is to come see that person?!”

“Y-Yes. I’m going to meet him the day after tomorrow,” she said with an embarrassed smile. Until now, my sister acted with the composure of an older person, but she now suddenly had a gentle look on her face like a maiden who had fallen in love.

“Hmm. I can’t take my eyes off of you, Onee-chan. Since when have you guys been dating?”

“We first met about a month ago... When I was staying at your house in June, we ran into each other in town... W-Well, strictly speaking, we’re not dating yet. We’ve only eaten dinner together once...”

“I see, I see. You guys aren’t dating yet—huh? Huh?” I had heard a certain set of words that I couldn’t just ignore, so I did a double take. “You’re not dating?”

“Y-Yes. We’re kind of just, like, friends or acquaintances...”

“You had sex, even though you’re not dating?”

“...Well, yes,” my sister said awkwardly and diverted her eyes.

I...had some very complicated feelings about this. On the one hand, I wanted to congratulate her, but on the other hand, I had an uneasy feeling in my chest I couldn’t get rid of.

“What? Onee-chan... What are you even doing?”

“Wh-What?! What’s wrong with it?!”

What’s wrong? Well, it’s not like anything is wrong... It’s not like anything is wrong, it’s just...

“Hmph. A kid like you probably doesn’t understand, Hime-chan, but adult relationships can take lots of different forms.”

“Forms? No... That’s not a thing. You’re horrible, Onee-chan! You should do those things properly. You’re an adult, and you’re almost forty, after all.”

“Excuse you, I-I’m almost thirty! I’m thirty-four!”

“The same kind of thing happened back then too, right? Like when you thought you were being cheated on by your boyfriend, but he only thought of you as a bang buddy.”

“Th-That was different! The guy I met this time is really committed!”

“As if! A guy who’s really interested in you wouldn’t have sex before you started dating.”

“Sh-Shut up! Not everyone is a reserved virgin like Momota-kun!”

“Huh?! Wh-What... Wh-Why are you bringing up Momota-kun? Why are you criticizing someone else’s boyfriend?!”

“You’re the one who started this fight!”

“I’m just warning you! Having sex right after you meet someone... That just makes you slutty! You’re a slutty milf!”

“A-A slutty milf?! You’re an idiot, Hime-chan! Why would you say something so horrible?! It’s rich coming from an annoying hardcore virgin!”

“H-Hardcore virgin?! It’s better than being easy! It’s better than being a loose slut!”

“Dummy! Idiot! You’re stupid, Hime-chan!”

“You’re stupid, Onee-chan! Stupid!”

“Knock it off, you two,” Yuki-chan said in a fed-up voice, putting an end to our sibling rivalry that had turned ugly (in part because of the alcohol). “I’d like to say you’re both in the wrong, but between the two of you I’d say this is more Hime’s fault.”

“Wh-What?”

“Kisaki-san has her own way of falling in love. It’d be wrong for another person to force their opinion on her.”

“I... I know that, but I’m worried, after all... I don’t know what I’d do if my sister got hurt again.” I saw up close just how much my sister got hurt by her divorce over her husband’s infidelity. She normally acts so composed and strong, but I’ve seen her hiding in the middle of the night and crying by herself.

I want to be unconditionally happy for my sister if she’s got a new boyfriend, but...finding out she had sex with someone that she isn’t even dating just makes me emotional.

“I’m sorry, Onee-chan...”

“...No. I’m sorry too, Hime-chan. Thank you for worrying about me. However,” she said with a look of fierce emotion before continuing, “I can’t afford to take my time. I’m divorced, I’m living with my parents, I don’t have a degree, and I’m thirty-four years old... I want to cherish these limited encounters. I’m just... I’m lonely!” As her voice filled with emotion, tears welled up in her eyes.

She then gulped down the last of her watered-down alcohol and said, “I want to be like you and Yuki-chan and have someone who loves me! Even though I’m divorced... No, because I’m divorced, this time I want to be happy!” she yelled loudly.

Our girls’ party continued after that, but because my sister had gotten into an unusual mood, she started to drink without thinking about her pace...

“Zzz...”

...and as a result, she soon fell asleep. She looked very comfortable as she slept sprawled out on the carpet. I put a blanket on her so she didn't catch a cold from the air conditioning.

“How could Kisaki-san get so drunk off of such weak drinks?” Yuki-chan looked surprised as she took a sip of my sister's leftover drink.

“My sister is deathly weak to alcohol.”

“Is it okay for someone like that to work as a hostess?”

“Well, the pub is owned by a friend of my mother, and she's just a helper. The customers are mostly local regulars, and I hear they don't force her to drink.”

“Really? That's good.” While she nodded, Yuki-chan filled her empty glass with more sake. Even though her bottle of sake was about halfway gone, her face wasn't turning red. As for me... I was about at my limit. The alcohol had worked its way through my system, and even though I didn't feel sick, I was feeling pleasantly sleepy.

“Hey, Hime,” Yuki-chan said to me as I started to become drowsy. In a calm, cool voice that didn't make her seem drunk, she asked, “When are you going to tell Kisaki-san the truth?”

“...” It was like I was splashed with cold water. I felt like my buzz and my drowsiness instantly disappeared.

“When are you going to tell her that Momota-kun isn't the rising young star of an IT company and is just a fifteen-year-old high school student?”

“I'll... I'll tell her the truth someday.”

“Really?”

I'd said “someday” like I was avoiding the issue, but Yuki-chan didn't pursue it any further. She just nodded silently and brought her cup to her lips.

My first boyfriend is a high schooler who's twelve years younger than me, and right now we're engaged in sexual misconduct. I can't tell her. There's no way I can tell her. However, one day, I'll have to. If I want to seriously think about a future with him—if I'm going to make our relationship something serious and

I'm not just playing around, it's something that I definitely can't avoid. My sister, my mother, my father, and Momota-kun's father—one day, we'll have to be accepted by both our families. I know this.

This uneasiness has been stirring deep in my heart the entire time. However, I'd like to keep dreaming somehow. I'd like to forget about reality and keep dreaming together. I want to continue to be intoxicated by the world's greatest miracle of finding mutual love and keep dreaming. I wish we could be left alone a little longer as we kept running away from our unavoidable reality.

As I held onto those naive thoughts like a prayer, I drank the last of my Cassis Orange.

I'll spoil the events that occur a little bit later. Before long, my sister will find out about our relationship. In terms of the time frame, it will be about two weeks from today. For a student like Momota-kun, that will be around right after summer vacation has ended. My sister, Orihara Kisaki, will learn the true identity of my boyfriend. She'll learn that Momota Kaoru is a fifteen-year-old high school student. What's more, it will be at a time that no one expected.

≡Chapter 3

The Many Worries of Princess Kisaki

One day, around the time when my summer vacation was halfway over, I went into town around lunchtime. I didn't really have anything I needed to do, and I just kind of came to the train station by myself for no real reason. Our chiropractic clinic was closed, so I didn't have my part-time job.

Both my dad and my sister said they had something to do and left the house. Since dinner had become "every man for himself," I decided to go have fun outside. Today was a normal weekday for the general public, so there was no way I could meet Orihara-san.

Well, sometimes it's nice to have days alone like this. Ever since I've gotten a girlfriend, I've been pretty busy. I've usually been spending my days off going on dates or working my part-time job. Sometimes it's nice to just wander around town on a day off.

"Phew..." I let out a sigh as I wandered around aimlessly inside the air-conditioned station building. After getting a quick lunch, I went to the bookstore, the video game store, the clothes store, and other places I wanted to go, but by the time I'd finished it wasn't even four o'clock.

Well, I wonder what I should do... I was planning to eat out for dinner, but it's still a little early for that. Maybe I'll kill some time by seeing a movie or something.

As I was walking along, thinking idly, I passed the drugstore inside of the station and saw someone unexpected.

"Hm?" There was a woman in the makeup section of the drugstore looking at herself intently in the mirror. She was fixing her hairstyle and checking her skin over and over again.

It was Kisaki-san: Orihara-san's big sister, Kisaki-san. She had recently come in from her hometown to have fun in the city, and right now she's staying at Orihara-san's apartment. Who would have thought she'd be in a place like this?

“Huh? Oh, Momota-kun?” It seemed she noticed my gaze as I was staring at her, and she approached me in a panic.



“Wh-What a surprise! Ha ha ha... Oh no, this is so embarrassing...”

“Not at all.” I didn’t think she had anything to be embarrassed about, but I guess for girls it might be embarrassing to be caught looking yourself over in the mirror?

“Is today a day off for you, Momota-kun?”

“Yes. I usually have summer break until about the end of this month.”

“The end of this month? That’s a pretty long break,” Kisaki-san said, surprised.

Crap! I responded out-of-character! Kisaki-san is supposed to think that I’m “the twenty-five-year-old rising star of an IT company”!

“W-Well, I say summer break, but it just kind of resembles a summer break! It’s like a period of time where we can relax because our more troublesome projects are over. At my company, our employees have flextime and can work freely...”

“Oh, is that so? I guess big IT companies are different, huh?” I thought that my lie was pretty forced, but Kisaki-san easily believed me.

“Um... What about you, Kisaki-san?” I asked as I looked her over. Rather than her usual comfortable style of pants, she was wearing an off-the-shoulder blouse and a long skirt. The area around her collar bone was dazzling and shining. She normally tied her hair behind her into a single ponytail, but today it was lightly curled. Also, she was wearing dark lipstick, and it looked like she’d put a little more work into her makeup than usual. “Do you have a date?”

“Huh? Oh, jeez, is it obvious?” Kisaki-san looked embarrassed but was kind of happily blushing. “The truth is, I do. We aren’t officially going out, so maybe it’s not really a date, but... I’ll be going out to eat with him after this.”

“Oh, I see.”

I heard that she’s been single ever since she got a divorce a few years ago, but it looks like she’s met someone new. Well, Kisaki-san is pretty after all. She’s really beautiful, like Orihara-san.

“It’s still a lot of time until we meet up, but I came early. Ha ha ha, it’s kind of embarrassing the way I look so enthusiastic about this...” She blushed as she

tried to laugh off her embarrassment. While her appearance was that of an adult woman experienced in the ways of the world, she looked as nervous as a girl going on her very first date. It was a charming contrast.

“Well, I hope you have a good time. I’m going to get going.”

“Okay... U-Uh, um...” After I quickly said goodbye and tried to leave, Kisaki-san spoke up.

“Huh?”

“Um... N-No, it’s nothing.”

“Oh... Okay. See you.” Although I felt like something was off, I once again said goodbye. However...

“W-Wait! Please wait, after all!” Kisaki-san hurried from behind and grabbed my hand. When I turned around to look at her, she had a desperate look on her face, like she was trying to cling on to me. “Um, Momota-kun, I have a favor to ask.”

“A favor?”

“Can we go somewhere we can be alone?”

The first thing that came to mind when I heard “somewhere we can be alone” was a karaoke booth. I’m not kidding. I couldn’t think of anywhere else. Nothing crossed my mind. It’s not like I’d completely memorized the location of a karaoke place in preparation for something someday...

Anyway, Kisaki-san and I entered the karaoke place in front of the train station.

“I wonder how long it’s been since the last time I went to karaoke. Do you come a lot, Momota-kun?”

“No, not really. Sometimes, my friends from school—I mean, people I’ve been close with since high school will invite me, and I’ll go then.”

“The last time I went was during the after-after-party for my friend’s wedding ceremony. That was like ten years ago, though. I haven’t had a lot of friends hold wedding ceremonies lately. A lot of times they’ll just get it done with relatives from both of their families.”

After we got ourselves sorted at the reception desk, we received a basket with microphones and a tag that had the number of our room on it. As we entered the dimly lit room, Kisaki-san's eyes lit up.

"Wow, amazing! Karaoke booths these days are so pristine! Wow, the TV is so big!" Her reactions were cute as she looked around the room. She sat down and started messing with the touch-panel device for choosing songs. "The remote control is so big and pretty... It's way more convenient these days. Back then, you had to use a songbook to look up each song and put them in."

"Songbook? What's that?"

"Huh... M-Momota-kun, you don't know about songbooks?!" Kisaki-san said, with a look of shock on her face. "You know, it's that really thick book that they always had at karaoke places. You'd use it to look up your song's number and punch in the digits with a remote to input it into the machine. It was about as thick as a phone book."

"Sorry, I don't really know it."

"I-Is that so? I'm sorry too... I'm a full-blown member of the songbook generation. When I was in high school, I even memorized the numbers of the songs I was good at."

"Incidentally, I don't really understand your example of 'it's as thick as a phone book.' When you say phone book, what kind of phone book do you mean?"

"What?! Y-You don't know what a phone book is?"

"Um... You don't mean a phone book app, do you?"

"N-No! I'm talking about a thick book made of paper. No way... Your generation didn't have phone books? There used to be one in every household... You've at least seen them with pay phones, right?"

"Sorry... I've never used a pay phone."

"Y-Your generation didn't use pay phones?!" Kisaki-san said with a look of anguish on her face, like someone socked her hard in the stomach. I didn't mean to offend her, but it looked like I'd rained down consecutive hits on her

without realizing it.

“Um... I’m sorry for not being very knowledgeable.”

“N-No, it’s all right. You’re a fresh, young twenty-five-year-old, Momota-kun. It’s only natural that my common knowledge as someone born in the eighties would be different from yours. After all, our ages are about ten years apart.” Kisaki-san spoke like she was trying to convince herself.

The truth is I’m fifteen and not twenty-five, so we have about twenty years between us, not ten...

“So, Kisaki-san, what was that favor you wanted to ask of me?”

“Oh. Yes, that’s right.” As I broached the topic, Kisaki-san sat up straight. “The truth is... I want to ask you for advice, Momota-kun.”

“Advice?”

“It’s not really something you can talk about in public,” she said in a frail voice as her gaze shifted left and right. “I’d like love advice, so to speak.”

“L-Love advice?” I repeated, and she nodded shyly. “You want it from *me*?”

“Y-Yes, I’d be glad to get a bunch of different advice from you.”

“No... That’s impossible. I don’t have any romantic experience at all. There’s no way I could give advice to an adult woman like you, Kisaki-san.”

“Could you please help me out somehow?” she said, bringing her hands together and lowering her head. “I understand, of course. I totally understand that you’ve never dated anyone aside from Hime-chan and that you’re a vir—a virtuous person.”

You were about to say “virgin” just now, weren’t you? I mean, it’s true. It’s true, but there’s just some things you should and shouldn’t say, you know?

“So, rather than romantic advice, it’s more like... I want to hear a man’s honest opinion.”

“A man’s honest opinion...”

“You don’t have to think so hard about it. If you just let me know what your thoughts are, it’ll be a huge help, Momota-kun.”

“O-Okay...” I couldn’t refuse after she asked me so humbly, and I wanted Kisaki-san to be happy. After all, she was the older sister of my girlfriend, so as her little sister’s boyfriend, I wanted to do what I could.

“I don’t know how much help it’ll be, but if you’re fine with my opinion...”

“Thank you, Momota-kun.” She smiled happily at me before her face changed to a serious look. “I think I’ve mentioned it before, but I have a date later on. My date is slightly older than me, and he invited me to go have dinner with him. But, as for after that...”

With an extremely serious look, Kisaki-san asked me: “Do you think it’d be okay if I had sex with him today?”

I was silent. *What should I say here? What kind of expression am I supposed to have right now?*

My emotions were just nothingness. What she’d just said was so shocking that, contrary to what you might expect, my mind had stopped working. My brain was so overloaded that it had given up on even trying to process what’d just happened. “Umm...”

“Th-That’s wrong! You’re wrong!” I hadn’t even said anything yet, but Kisaki-san looked like she was going to cry as she repeatedly told me I was wrong. “It’s not like that. It’s not... There’s a deeper reason for this!”

“Reason?”

“It’s like, I’ve already...done it once with him,” Kisaki-san said, making a face like she was suppressing her embarrassment.

“Huh? You’ve already done it? But you just said that you guys aren’t dating yet.”

“Th-That’s true but, hey, sometimes there’s just the heat of the moment, you know?”

I didn’t know what to say.

How should I know? Hmm. I guess that kind of thing happens? Like, with one-night stands and stuff?

For a fifteen-year-old high schooler like myself who had just gotten his first

girlfriend, the conversation was a little over my head, so I couldn't keep up.

"Since we've already slept together once, I'm sure that after dinner it'll happen again."

"I-Is that so?"

"It will. After all, we're both adults." She said it to me like it was a matter of fact.

I see. It's hard being an adult.

"It's just, I'm worried that we'll slip into *that* kind of relationship since we were physical with each other when we weren't even dating. And on top of that," she began, eyes filled with anxiety, "a certain person told me, 'Having sex with someone before you're even dating makes you slutty.' According to them, I'm 'a slutty milf.'"

"What?!"

A slutty milf? Such frightening words... It feels like the kind of abuse that uproots your dignity as a woman. What a terrible insult...

"Someone actually called you something that terrible?"

"They did! Don't you think it's horrible?"

"Yes, it's horrible. The relationship between a man and a woman is ultimately a matter between the two of them, and it isn't something that other people should criticize. I'm sure you had your reasons, Kisaki-san, so to call you slutty... It's unforgivable!"

"I know! It's unforgivable, right?"

"Even if, and this is a big if, they were just saying you have a loose sense of morals, I'd understand. But calling you a milf is totally unrelated!"

"That's right! It's rude enough calling me slutty, but I don't get the point of adding on 'milf' to it! I'm not a milf, I'm still around thirty years old!"

"Who the heck said something that horrible to you, Kisaki-san?"

"It was your girlfriend."

"...Yeah, well, I guess there are some things you should reflect on, Kisaki-san."

“Why did your attitude change so quickly?!” Kisasi-san was shocked.

I’m sorry, but as a boyfriend, I’m going to have to side with my girlfriend. I was thinking, “I must protect my girlfriend’s sister!” but if the person I’m protecting her from is my girlfriend herself, then I have no choice but to take my girlfriend’s side. That said... You sure did say some harsh things, Orihara-san. Were you drunk?

“W-Well, I think Hime-chan was just worried about me too. I mean, even I think that inviting him to a hotel on the first day we met was a bit much.”

“On the first day you met?!”

“I-It’s complicated for adults!” Kisasi-san yelled, trying to dodge the question.

On the first day they met... What’s more, Kisasi-san was the one who suggested going... Adult women sure are amazing. “There’s even a part of me that regrets how I kind of rushed things. Also, since Hime-chan admonished me, I’ve been thinking about a lot of things.”

“...”

“I don’t want to be thought of as some easy woman, but...I’m afraid he won’t like me if I refuse him. On top of that, I worry that it might actually be more shameful for someone like me who isn’t getting any younger to act stuck up about it.”

“It isn’t shameful at all...” She had an expression on her face like she’d been pushed into a corner, so I said to her, “I think that whether or not you have a physical relationship before you start dating is up to the values of the individual, but...I think it’s wrong to endure something you don’t want to do because you don’t want to be disliked.”

“Momota-kun...”

“Your age and your marital history don’t have anything to do with your sense of virtue. If you don’t want to do it, then you should just refuse him. If he leaves you because of that, then that’s his problem.”

“Thank you. You’re right. If I don’t want to do it, there’s no need to force myself to go along with it.” She smiled kindly and nodded like she understood.

I'm glad. It looks like I was able to give her some good advice.

However, just as I felt a sense of relief, Kisaki-san got an extremely serious look on her face and asked, "But what should I do if I want to have sex?"

I had no words. Just like before—actually, more so than before—I was overcome with a feeling of emptiness. "Um..."

"N-No! It's not like that!" I must have looked more like I was pitying her rather than cringing, because Kisaki-san started to panic and make excuses when she looked at my face. "No... It's just, our bodies were really compatible!"

Is that supposed to be an excuse?!

"No, that's not it, it's not! But today is right before my period, so there's also that..."

Uh, you know, that's not really an excuse either!

"Um, it might be hard for you to understand, Momota-kun, since you're dating a girl like Hime-chan, but women have sexual desires too!"

"Hmm, is that so?" In contrast to Kisaki-san, who was getting more and more flustered, I could feel my enthusiasm leaving my body. I didn't know why, but I instantly stopped caring. "Well, why don't you just do what you want, Kisaki-san?"

"Hey! You just think I'm being annoying, don't you, Momota-kun?! You just think this is a bother, so you're trying to blow me off!"

"That's not true..."

To be honest, it is. This is getting pretty annoying.

To sum it up and put it bluntly: it's not like she didn't want to do it, she just didn't want her date to think she's easy. The dilemma that was tormenting Kisaki-san was created from her pride as a woman and her lust. I understood that. I understood that, but... I really didn't care anymore. The only thought on my mind was, *Just do what you want.*

"You're terrible, Momota-kun! I was seriously asking you for advice! You think I'm a slutty milf too, don't you?!"

“I... I...”

“Why are you at a loss for words?! Are you really thinking that?! Waa! Momota-kun, you big dummy!”

“Wait, watch out!” Kisasi-san had tears in her eyes as she came at me and punched me in the chest. I reflexively bent backwards, but the edge of the couch was behind me. I stuck out my hands to catch myself on the sofa, but I totally missed and lost my balance.

“Whoa!”

“Huh—Eek!” As I fell over onto the floor, Kisasi-san, who had been putting her weight on my body, fell as well. I thought I’d somehow save her and reflexively stuck out my hands, and the palms of my hand were overcome with a boundless squishy sensation.

“Huh...”

“Ah!”

It was an amazing feeling. While I felt like my hands were going to be sucked in by the soft sensation, there was nonetheless an extraordinary mass and elasticity to it. I could tell even through her clothes: her boobs were huge. Even with my larger-than-average hands that I prided myself on, her breasts had such overwhelming volume that I couldn’t fit them in my palm.

I had been able to support her and keep her from falling, but that wasn’t the issue; right now, I was touching Kisasi-san’s voluptuous breasts.

“Wh-Whoa!”

“Eek!” We both finally understood what was going on, and we separated from one another in a panic.

“I’m sorry! I’m r-really sorry!”

“I-It’s okay. I know that it was an accident. You were just trying to keep me from falling, right?” Kisasi-san was holding her chest in embarrassment, but she didn’t look angry and just had a troubled grimace on her face. “I’m sorry, I was heavy, wasn’t I?”

“N-No.”

Oh man, what should I do? A feeling of guilt—one that far outweighed my arousal—filled my chest. I felt guilty for what I did to Kisaki-san, and I felt really guilty when I thought about Orihara-san.

What should I do? Before I ever even touched my own girlfriend's breasts, I touched her sister's...

“Hey...” I was about to be crushed by my guilt when Kisaki-san said, “Do you like big breasts, Momota-kun?”

“Wh-Why do you ask?!”

“Do you?” As I was confused and stammered my words, Kisaki-san stared at me with upturned eyes.

“Well... Yeah, I do like them.”

“I see. Well, you would. You are dating Hime-chan, after all.”

“N-No, it's not like I chose Orihara-san just because of her breasts—”

“I hope he likes big boobs like you do, Momota-kun,” Kisaki-san mumbled to herself as she ignored my panic.

“Um, I think that most men in the world probably like big breasts.”

“Y-You don't know that though, right? There are people who like slender women. Besides, there are people who like younger women too...” As she said that, Kisaki-san had a look of deep anxiety in her eyes. She was seriously worried about whether or not she was her date's type.

When I thought back on it, I realized she was serious when she asked me for love advice earlier. Even though our conversation went a bit off the rails, I think that she was serious, nonetheless. She was earnestly worried, troubled, and about to be crushed by her anxiety. And when I realized her feelings... I chuckled.

“He he.” I felt bad, but a smile broke out onto my face.

“Huh? Wh-What's so funny?”

“Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that I was thinking you must really like this person.”

“What? Y-You think so?”

“If you didn’t like him, I don’t think you’d be this anxious about it.”

You become anxious because of how much you like someone, and you become timid because of how much you love someone. I knew that feeling so well it hurt. You’re always fighting with your anxiety over whether or not your girlfriend loves you or if you’re being a suitable boyfriend for her. It’s cruel, but love and anxiety are two sides of the same coin.

“I’m a little jealous of that guy and how he has a wonderful lady like you thinking so seriously about him.”

“Momota-kun... I see, you’re right,” Kisaki-san said, nodding like she understood. “Ever since I met him and...we hit it off, I’ve been flustered the entire time. I’ve been concerned about things like my age and how I’m a divorcée, and I became absolutely desperate to take advantage of this limited chance. I got so flustered that I forgot about the most important and most fundamental thing: my feeling that I like him.”

After she got done mumbling like she was making a monologue, her face turned red. “Ha ha ha. It’s kind of embarrassing saying stuff like this again at my age.”

“Age doesn’t matter when you fall in love with someone,” I said, but it wasn’t what I was really thinking.

There’s no way that it wouldn’t matter. When it comes to love, age is an especially important factor, I think. Your age and your partner’s age are issues that follow you no matter what you do, and nothing can change that. Time is transient, and people can’t return to the past. No matter how much you may desire it, you can’t rewind time, and you can’t become younger or keep yourself from aging. Therefore, the gap in your ages will never be closed. As long as you walk through the same time as one another, the age gap will never close.

Still... I want to say it. I want to say out loud that age doesn’t matter when you fall in love with someone.

“...Yeah. I’d like to think that it doesn’t matter.” Kisaki-san smiled with a little bit of self-mockery mixed in. It seemed that the front I’d been putting on—my idealistic thought that I put into words—was easily seen through. “All right. I’ve decided!” After briefly pondering, Kisaki-san said, “Today, I’m going to tell him

I've fallen for him."

"You're going to say it?"

"I've been worrying and strategizing about things, but...when I really think about things, I haven't even been standing at the starting line." Her voice sounded nervous, but it looked like she'd been reinvigorated and like she had cast something off. "I was in such a rush to get results. I feel like I was only doing things in a roundabout way. I wasn't able to face things head-on, and I blamed all of my cowardice on my age."

"Kisaki-san..."

"I'm too old to be a princess nowadays, so I can't just wait for some prince to propose to me," Kisaki-san said jokingly with a powerful smile, and I couldn't help but smile as well.

"I think you've got the right idea."

"Yeah, I'll try my best. Thank you, Momota-kun. Thanks to you, I've made up my mind. I'm glad I asked you for advice."

"I really didn't do anything." Kisaki-san grasped my hand and looked me in the eye.

"If you have any problems, please tell me any time. I'll do my best to give you advice. For example..."

"For example?"

"Hmm. For example...if you mess up during your first time with Hime-chan?"

"I'll pass." I refused her offer with a tired voice, but on the inside, I thought about seriously coming to her for advice if I really did mess up.

The next day, I got a phone call from Kisaki-san where she faithfully reported to me how things turned out. As it so happens, things were a great success, and Kisaki-san started dating that man. Plus, he was the one who confessed his feelings to her.

"It was so amazing! When I got to where we were meeting up, he was waiting there with a bouquet of roses! And he said, 'The order of how we did things may have been reversed, but please go out with me with marriage in mind.'

Mmm, it was so cliché! It was totally cliché! But that's what makes it good! He was clumsy about it, but I'm really happy that he tried his best like that!"

This had marked the third time I'd heard her tell her story while breathing heavily. I gave her a disinterested "That's nice" to show that I was listening. Her calling me was less about her feeling she had a duty to report how things went to the person she asked for advice and more about how she just wanted to brag.

"Oh, I feel like an idiot for worrying so much about it! I can't believe he was planning on confessing to me first!" she said in a sunny voice like she was at the peak of happiness.

It turns out it was all no big deal. The man was planning on having a serious relationship with her from the very beginning. It seemed that all of her anguish about her age, her past as a divorcée, whether it's okay that she slept with him while they weren't dating, her worry that they were just going to have a relationship all about sex, and whether she'd be thought of as troublesome was based on unfounded fears.

"It really is nice when the man confesses. No matter how far things go with gender equality, we need guys to do their best for that part. If the guy can't be dependable when he needs to be, a woman won't want to stand by him. After all, women are still princesses, no matter what age they are."

I thought to myself, *That's the exact opposite of what you were saying yesterday*, but she seemed happy, so I didn't point it out.

"I'm so ashamed of myself for suspecting that he was after my body. While I was worrying about that dumb stuff, he was seriously considering a future with me..."

"He's a sincere person, isn't he?"

"Yes, but... Yesterday, we ended up doing it again." She simultaneously seemed like she had a hard time saying it but also couldn't resist the urge.

"..."

"He was even more intense yesterday... When I found out that we had feelings for each other, I couldn't stop myself either. We made love over and

over again like we were devouring each other's bodies. It was utterly amazing."

"I-I see."

You really didn't have to say all that though. I really didn't want to hear it. I mean, this kind of story is just too much for a fifteen-year-old high school boy. Well, anyway...

"Congratulations, Kisaki-san."

"Thank you, Momota-kun. If we end up getting married, I'll be sure to introduce him to you," Kisaki-san said happily.

"I'm looking forward to it." And so, on that day in August, Kisaki-san got herself a new boyfriend.

📌Chapter 4

Thumbelina's Summer Break

It was a day after the Obon holiday, and summer break was over halfway done. I was gradually starting to fret because of my unfinished homework, but I was somehow able to trick myself into ignoring it. Like always, my father had work and my mother had her part-time job, so I had to look after my little brother today. Since I started my summer break, there had been days where I'd had to watch my brother for the entire day, and today was probably my fourth time doing it.

I probably shouldn't say something like this, but...I was starting to get tired of it. It's not like I hated my little brother, and I had fun playing with him, but it wears you out. Seriously, where did this preschooler get his endless energy and vigor from? He'd try to run off all by himself and do who-knows-what if you took your eyes off him, so you'd have to be always watching. Then, just when you think he's got energy to spare, he'd suddenly become sleepy and get all cranky. Solo parenting is tough.

Still, I thought of it as my duty as a big sister, so we did things like watch Amazon Prime together and go to the pool, and I took him to play at the municipal indoor playground. I worked hard for my little brother, but this big sister was worn out...

...So that's why today we were going someplace that I liked! My plan was that I'd kill two birds with one stone by entertaining my little brother while going to the places that I wanted to. *Mamas also being able to enjoy themselves is an important part of raising a child! Probably!* With this determination, I took my brother and rode on the bus to the train station.

"Hey, Saki-nee-san." As we were walking around inside the station building, my little brother, Aki, pulled my hand. "I want to play the gacha machine." He was looking at the station's video arcade with sparkling eyes.

Kids have a surprisingly good memory. If you give into their selfishness and

buy them a toy or some candy even once...there's no going back. They remember the store as "The place where they bought me a toy," and every time they pass by it, they'll start begging you to buy them one. Once before, I let him play gacha at this arcade. Since then, it seems like my little brother remembers this arcade as "the place where my sister let me play the gacha machine," and now he begs to play it every time he passes by here.

Oh no. I shouldn't have come this way...

"No, Aki. You just played it not too long ago, right?"

"What? Come on, please?"

"No means no."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Just because." We did our usual back and forth, and Aki puffed out his cheeks and stopped walking.

"But today I was going to do what you wanted to do, Onee-chan..."

His words made me weak. After all, the places I wanted to go to probably wouldn't be much fun for a preschooler.

"Sigh... Fine. You can do it just one time."

"Really?! Yay!"

"Hey, wait a minute! It's definitely just going to be one time!" I chased after Aki in a hurry after he shook free from my hand and started running.

The inside of the arcade was dimly lit and overflowing with noise. Since it was summer break, there were a lot of young people who looked like students. Aki ran as fast as he could to the gacha machine area and started to stare at the many machines from one end to the other.

"Hmm. Which one should I choose?"

"You only get to do it once, okay? Also, your budget is two hundred yen."

You can't take gacha machines lightly. They have this image of costing one hundred yen for one go, but the truth is there are surprisingly few hundred-yen gacha machines. If the prizes are character goods from an anime or tokusatsu show, then it isn't uncommon for one to cost more than two hundred yen. There are even some ridiculously expensive ones that cost five hundred yen for one go.

"Okay! I'll go with Denshaido!" Aki said, and he chose the gacha machine for a train robot. *Coupling Robot Denshaido* was a robot anime shown on weekend mornings. I wasn't really interested in it, so I don't know a lot about it, but I think it's about something like a bunch of kids getting chosen to fight giant monsters with train robots. Following his love for *Super Sentai* and *Kamen Rider*, lately Aki had been hooked on robot anime. He wouldn't watch *Pretty Cure* at all, so every week I ended up watching it by myself.

Hmm... I wonder why he won't watch it. I'm definitely sure even boys would like it if they just watched it!

I took out two hundred yen from my wallet and handed it to Aki, who excitedly put the money into the machine and turned the lever. He opened the capsule that popped out, and on the inside was a small train robot doll. It had a black torso with a blue arm and a pink arm.

"Wow, awesome! It's Denshaido's Freight Bed Combination Mode!"

"Is that good?"

"Yeah! It's really powerful!"

"Oh, wow."

"The Freight Bed Combination Mode is awesome! In it, Denshaido can use the Left Freight Train and Right Sleeper Car at the same time to beat up the monsters with cargo and beds!"

"...Wow."

The show's setting is too surreal for me to understand, but if he's happy then it's fine. It's way better than him crying to do it "one more time" because he got a bad gacha.

“Okay Aki, we have to go. I’ll hold on to Denshaido so you don’t lose it, so—hmm?” As I spoke to Aki while throwing the empty capsule into the dedicated trash can, he was gazing at a single point while holding onto his doll. I followed his gaze and saw he was looking at the rhythm game section of the arcade. I don’t know much about them, but there were a lot of games where you tap the machine in time with the rhythm.

In the section’s corner was a sight to behold. There was a short man wearing a baseball cap whose movements were super quick as he played the rhythm game. He nimbly tapped the buttons in time with the music over and over again. You could tell that even though his movements were intense, his touch was very soft, as he used only the minimum amount of strength to touch the buttons. His motions were lightning fast and incredibly smooth. It was amazing. So amazing that it was kind of creepy.

“Hmm?” As my attention was captivated by his overwhelming skill, I suddenly realized.

Huh? Isn’t that guy Urano? He has the exact same stature as him, and I feel like I’ve seen that hat before... Lemme just move and get a look at him from the side... Yep, it’s Urano.

The gloomy-looking bangs, that enviable pale, clean skin, and that face that’s actually pretty cute when you get a good look at it: there was no doubt about it. He seemed to be focusing on the screen and appeared to not notice me. There wasn’t anyone else around, and he was apparently playing by himself.

He’s playing rhythm games by himself in a video arcade in the middle of the day during summer break? That’s so like him.

Hmm, I wonder what I should do. Now that I’ve seen him, should I say hello? I feel like it would be rude to interrupt him when he’s so into playing his game, though.

As I was thinking about all of this...

“Saki-nee, that guy is awesome!” Aki said, in a very loud voice as children often do. They’ll even talk to strangers out of nowhere. Also, they’ll give you a loud report of the strangers’ actions or what they’re saying.

“Huh?” Just as there was a break in the game, Urano looked behind him and his eyes went wide when he noticed me. “I-It’s you...”

“Yoo-hoo! What a coincidence, huh?” I gave him a casual greeting and walked over to him as I pulled Aki’s hand. “I was only watching you for a little bit, but you were amazing. The way you moved your hands made you look like the thousand-armed goddess of mercy. It was funny how good you were.”

“Geh. Don’t make fun of me! This right here is a cutting-edge rhythm game that’s popular among Japan’s hardcore rhythm game fans right now.”

“I’m not making fun of you! Well, I did think it was kind of creepy how good you were.”

“You are making fun of me!” Urano said, losing his temper.

Jeez, we’ve only just bumped into each other and this guy is already being annoying.

“Saki-nee, is he your friend?” Aki said as he curiously looked up at me.

“Yes, he’s a friend from school.”

“W-We’re not friends. At best, we’re classmates...” Urano mumbled in a small voice. He then looked at Aki. “Is this kid your little brother?”

“That’s right. His name is Aki. Come on Aki, say ‘Hello.’”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Ibusuki Aki,” Aki said with a proper greeting.

“H-Hey,” Urano said, looking a little nervous. However, when he noticed the doll that Aki was holding, the look in his eyes changed. “Huh? Hey, is that Denshaido’s Freight Bed Combination Mode?!”

“Onii-san, you know about *Denshaido*?”

“Yeah, I watch it every week! Damn, you’re lucky. I wanted this one too, but it just wouldn’t come out.”

“...You like *Denshaido* too?” I asked without thinking, probably sounding dumbfounded. “That ridiculous robot’s ridiculous mode is really that good?”

“Of course it’s good!” Urano began with fiery passion. “Denshaido’s Freight Bed Combination Mode is awesome! In it, Denshaido can use the Left Freight

Train and Right Sleeper Car at the same time to beat the monsters by hitting them with cargo and beds!”

His explanation was about the same as Aki’s. What’s up with that? Is it the official explanation or something? I still don’t get it.

“Coupling Robot Denshaido is super hot right now. It’s an anime aimed at kids, but the director is a big name from the good old days of robot anime. There’s a lot of heart and soul put into the depictions of the robots’ transformations and fight scenes, and it’s getting high praise from even adult fans. On the other hand, it’s also really famous for its mediocre depictions of its main theme, trains. Like, in the show there will be a situation where the characters are supposed to be riding a regular train, but the chairs that are drawn are from a bullet train, or their train will stop at a station it isn’t supposed to, and it gets the show criticized to hell and back by adult fans who know a lot about those type of things. Every time it airs there’s a huge fight between its fans and its haters. Well, I’m the type who enjoys anime with a cool head while those guys have their ugly squabbles on the side. It’s kind of like, I look down from a neutral position when I watch my anime and—”

“You always talk a lot when it comes to stuff you like, huh?”

“Sh-Shut up!” Urano shouted as his face turned bright red. I ignored him and grabbed Aki’s hand.

“Come on, Aki. You did your gacha, so it’s time to go. Let’s hurry up and get some boba tea.”

My goal for today is to get some boba milk tea. I want to go to the new boba tea store in the station, buy some boba milk tea, and post a good picture on Instagram. All the high school girls around here are doing it, and I want to do it too.

“You said boba tea?” Urano said like he was bluntly making fun of me. “Geh. There it is, boba tea. You’re being swayed by a fad. Do you have any idea how much that stuff costs? It’s such a waste how people will line up for such a long time and pay such a high price for those lumps of starch.”

“So what? It doesn’t matter, does it? It’s popular on Instagram.”

“*And* here comes Instagram. ‘It’s popular on Instagram’ is the peak of stupidity and height of human folly. I’d get it if you liked the taste, but I don’t understand just jumping on the bandwagon and flocking to something when you don’t even really like it.”

“...”

“An Instagram-worthy picture is more important than the taste, right? What you like isn’t the boba tea, but doing something trendy, right? You’re going to throw it away without even drinking the whole thing and litter the town, right? I feel sorry for the boba left in the bottom of the cup.”

“Okay, then let me ask you,” I said while suppressing my anger and pointing to the rhythm game cabinet that Urano was just playing on. “Aren’t you also just playing that game because it’s popular?”

“What? N-No! I’m just purely enjoying it as a video game!”

“You were trying so hard when you were playing it, but will improving your skills in that game be useful for something in the future? Boba tea might make your stomach feel bloated, but is there some benefit to paying money to get good at a video game?”

“I-It’s not about being useful or anything like that! I just play it because I like it! That’s what entertainment and hobbies are all about!”

“That’s true. Entertainment is a personal choice. So, if I feel like following the trend and enjoying boba tea, that’s also my choice, right?”

“Th-That’s...”

“Seriously... Even though you get upset when someone makes fun of something you like, you go ahead and make fun of the things other people like, huh?”

Urano was at a loss for words and got a regretful look on his face. “Damn it! You always, always make fun of me! Tell me your birthday! You won’t get away with this if you’re younger than me!”

“It’s in April.”

“Ugh... I lost...”

“When is yours, by the way?”

“...It’s in March.”

“You actually thought you could one-up me with your birthday like that?!”

Of course you’d lose! You had an eleven out of twelve chance of losing!

“Shut up! I was betting on a miracle! Damnit!” Having suffered a huge—and totally obvious—defeat, Urano’s eyes filled with tears, and he faced the ground.

So, he was born in March. Since I was born in April, that makes me his classmate, but our age is about a year apart. So that makes me slightly older...

As I was absentmindedly thinking about those things, Aki looked up at Urano and said, “Hey, Onii-chan. Come have boba tea with us.”

Surprisingly, Urano went along with us. I thought he’d say something like “That’s dumb” and refuse, but he was like, “W-Well, if you insist, then I’ll go with you,” and came with us.

Hmm. I guess even he’s nice to kids.

If I’m being honest, Urano coming along helped me out. I’d heard a rumor that this new boba tea store was really popular and that right now during summer break you’d have to line up for it even during lunchtime on a weekday. I thought my biggest problem would be keeping Aki happy while we lined up, so it was a big help that Urano was grabbing our seats with him.

After lining up for about twenty minutes, I took drinks for the three of us to where the two of them were waiting.

“Hey, Urano-onii-chan. Which do you think is stronger: Denshaido’s Freight Bed Combination Mode, or the Taxiido’s President Beast Form from last week?”

“Oh, that’s a good question, Aki. Hmm, Denshaido’s rival robot Taxiido and its powered-up President Beast form, huh? Well, according to the official lore, Denshaido is able to fight at high speeds by using the special metal, densha metal, to cause a dimensional interface activation phenomenon. However, in President Beast Form, Taxiido has the ability to transcend time and space by completely consuming dimensions. The Freight Bed Mode is an amazing mode that can use the special properties of both Freight Train and Sleeper Car at the

same time, but it would probably be tough for it to beat President Beast.”

“Oh no... Then does that mean Denshaido is going to lose?”

“Don’t worry. Supposedly, the Freight Bed Combination Mode is what you’d call an intermediary form. According to a spoiler circulating around the internet, around the week after next the final—”

“Huh?”

“Oh! Um, a-anyway, it’ll be okay. Believe in Denshaido. If you believe, then Denshaido will surely answer!”

“Okay, I will!”

They’re sure getting along really well... They’re even calling each other “Urano-onii-chan” and “Aki.”

“Here you go,” I said, placing the tray on the table and setting out the drinks. “Aki, were you being a good boy while you waited?”

“Yeah! I talked about *Denshaido* with Urano-onii-chan. He’s amazing! He knows everything.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” I handed Aki a small mango juice and looked at Urano. “Thank you, Urano.”

“It’s not like I did anything worth thanking me over.”

“I didn’t think I’d get to see a side of you that was actually good at communicating.”

“Hmph. Don’t underestimate me. I can get along with someone if we have something in common to talk about and I’m way older than them, even if it’s our first time meeting each other.”

“...That’s not really something to brag about, you know?” As I sighed, I handed over the regular milk tea that he asked me for. Apparently after making fun of it so much, it was hard for him to ask for one with boba in it.

“Here.” After abruptly taking his drink, Urano handed me money for it. It was the exact amount—including tax, and to the nearest yen.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll treat you as thanks for coming with me.”

“That’s no good. I don’t want to owe you one for something like this.”

“Is that so?” He was being a pain in the neck, so I just took the money.

Seriously, just what is his deal? Well, whatever. I’ll just pull myself together.

“Okay, I’m going to take a picture, so give me some space... Yes, like that. The pattern on this store’s table looks nice. I’ll just place the boba tea here, and... Yes, that’s perfect! I think I can take the same type of picture as everyone else!”

“Seriously, what’s so fun about doing all of that?” I ignored Urano’s complaining and took several pictures of my boba tea and posted the best one on Instagram.

After that, the three of us enjoyed our fancy drinks in the fancy shop for a little while, but before long a problem occurred.

“Hey, Urano? Won’t you try some of this?”

“You left some of your drink after all?!” When I showed him my half-full drink, Urano verbally jabbed at me with all his might.

What should I do? There was, surprisingly, a lot of this boba milk tea. The abundance of boba and sweet taste made me feel really full.

“If you can’t drink the whole thing, then you should have ordered the small size in the first place.”

“B-But if it wasn’t this size, it wouldn’t look good on Instagram...”

“What’s driving you to take it this far?”

“On top of that, I don’t really like milk tea.”

“Really?!”

“I like the unsweetened, refreshing taste of black tea. I don’t want to make it all sweet by adding milk and sugar to it...”

The look in Urano’s eyes as he said nothing further had already changed from mocking me to pitying me.

“Please, Urano. Drink this... I have to leave room in my stomach for the cheese tea I plan on drinking next.”

“You’re going for *another* high-calorie drink? I mean... No, I don’t want that.” Urano was fervently refusing the boba tea that I tried to give to him.

“Come on, can’t you help me out a little bit?”

“I-I said I don’t want it. You already drank from it.”

“You sure are concerned about cleanliness all of a sudden.”

“I-It’s not about cleanliness.” As his face turned red, Urano said, “I-It’d be an indirect kiss, wouldn’t it?”

“Hmm...”

Now that you mention it, it certainly would be. I was so worried about disposing of my drink that I forgot to consider that. However, I can’t back down! I mean, if I suddenly said he can’t do it because it’s an indirect kiss, it’d seem like I’m noticing him as a man!

“J-Just drink it! What’s with this indirect kiss talk? You’re not a middle schooler, you know.”

“Th-That’s not it! I just don’t want to drink something with your dirty saliva on it!”

“What do you mean dirty?!”

“Other people’s saliva is dirty!”

“Hmm. You’re saying things like that, but you’re really just thinking of me as a woman, so that’s why an indirect kiss is embarrassing, right?”

“What?!” Urano’s face turned bright red.

Huh? What? H-Hold on a minute. Why did you blush and stop talking just now? You’re not going to say anything back? If you act like that, it’s like you’re...

“Fine! G-Give me that!” After freezing up for a few seconds, Urano snatched the boba tea from me and started to move the straw toward his lips. “I-I’m totally fine with having an indirect kiss with you!”



Despite his words, his voice and his hand were shaking.

Oh no... What should I do? He's acting so embarrassed that it's making me feel embarrassed too!

Before long, Urano's lips were just about to touch the straw that my own lips had touched, when suddenly...

"I want to drink it too." Aki, who had been playing with his *Denshaido* toy by himself at the corner of the table, leaned forward like he suddenly remembered something. Then, without any hesitation or shyness, he nonchalantly put his lips on the straw.

"Ah," Urano and I both said.

"Blegh. It tastes funny." Aki frowned as he had his very first drink of milk tea.

"Urano-onii-chan, you can have it."

"Th-Thanks." After taking the drink, Urano took a look at me. "Okay, I'll take the rest..."

"Go right ahead..." This time, Urano drank from the straw without hesitation. It seems he wasn't embarrassed about getting an indirect kiss from an indirect kiss.

Phew. I suddenly feel very tired.

After exiting the boba tea shop, we headed to an indoor amusement park—it was a Round One—that was close to the station. The truth is that I had planned on having some of that cheese tea that was popular right now, but my stomach was hurting from that boba milk tea, after all. I didn't have the energy to drink any more calorie-rich drinks, but it was still too early to go home, so I thought I'd take Aki somewhere he could play and decided on Round One.

"So you're following us again, huh?"

"I-It's not like I came because I wanted to! I came because I was invited!" Urano came along again after Aki said, "You come too, Urano-onii-chan."

I wonder if he has more time on his hands than I thought.

"It's fine. Well, since we're here, let's play as much as we can!" I declared as I

tried lightly dribbling the basketball I held in my hand. We were in the sports area on the top floor of the building. The three-on-three basketball court was open, so the three of us were on it together.

“Weren’t you bad at ball games, Urano?”

“No. I’m not really bad or good at them.”

“Hmm, really? When we played basketball during P.E. in the first semester, you barely touched the ball and just wandered around.”

“Give me the ball.” Urano took the basketball from me and started to dribble the ball nimbly on the floor. He then went straight to the hoop and made a smooth layup shot. The ball bounced off the backboard, passed through the rim, and shook the net. It was a totally normal but truly beautiful layup.

“Urano-onii-chan, that was amazing!”

“Y-You’re good at this...”

“Hmph. I may not look it, but I’m actually not bad at sports.”

“I see. You’re totally different from Momota.”

“Don’t compare me to Momo. He’s the kind of poor athlete that only comes along once every hundred years.”

“Oh.”

“Even though he’s blessed with his height and build and isn’t left wanting for strength, he’s the kind of rarity that’s no good when it comes to ball sports. I can still remember it... Back during this spring, the basketball team and volleyball team descended onto our classroom and fought over who would recruit him. It only took him showing his face at their trial practices one time for no one to ever come to recruit him again...”

“Oh...”

Yeah, Momota really is bad at sports. I feel sorry for him because from a glance he actually looks like he could be really good at sports. There probably aren’t many people who are bad at sports and can hold a basketball in one hand...

“But Urano, if you’re so good at basketball, you should have just played around more normally in P.E. before. Why did you pretend you were bad at it?”

“I don’t hate exercise, and it’s not like I’m bad at it, but... I hate doing it with a bunch of people who I don’t even know very well... I don’t want to stand out in P.E. class, and I don’t want to have anything to do with anyone...” There was a deep darkness in Urano’s eyes as he spoke.

Hmm. I sort of understand what he’s talking about.

“Hey, Saki-nee. Can you do that too?” Aki said as he looked up at me with eyes full of expectation.

“Of course. Your big sister can do something like that easily.” I was putting on airs because I wanted to show off as his older sister. “Take a good look, Aki. You too, Urano.” I picked up the ball and headed for the hoop as I dribbled the ball.

Um... How do you do a layup again? It was definitely something like this... Huh? The ball is—ah, wait, my feet are—! Oh no, I’m already right underneath the goal!

Agh, I don’t know anymore! Here!

Though clumsily, I jumped with all of my might, somehow launched the ball upwards with both my hands, and it miraculously went through the hoop.

“I did it! Hehe! How about that?! Did you see my magnificent layup?!” I turned around to gloat...but for some reason, they weren’t really reacting. Aki stood there with a blank face, and Urano looked away while blushing. “Huh? Wh-What’s wrong?”

“Saki-nee, we could see your underwear,” Aki said with a slightly annoyed look on his face.

“What?!” I reflexively held down my skirt. *Oh no. I didn’t plan on exercising today, so I wore a skirt! And I just jumped as hard as I could!* “Urano... D-Did you look?”

“I-I wasn’t looking! You showed them to me!”

“You were looking!”

“Sh-Shut up! It’s not like I want to see your dirty panties!”

“Th-They’re not dirty! I’m wearing a new pair!”

“I don’t care! You dummy! Dummy!” As we ended up having another ugly argument, Aki ignored us and started playing with a miniature goal for kids.

We did basketball, badminton, ping pong, darts, and played in the kids’ zone. Time flew by as the three of us enjoyed ourselves.

By the way, Urano was able to play most of the sports flawlessly and with ease. It kind of ticked me off how cocky Urano was considering he was, well, Urano.

“That sure was fun, huh?” The three of us left Round One and headed for the train station. Aki had tired himself out and fallen asleep, so right now Urano was carrying him on his back. “Are you okay, Urano? He isn’t too heavy?”

“I can handle this much.”

“If it’s too hard for you, I’ll switch with you, so just tell me, okay?”

“I said I’m fine. As if I could let you carry him in this situation.”

“Really? You don’t want people to think that you, the man, are taking it easy?”

“There’s that,” Urano said, and then he got a sour look on his face. “If you carried Aki right now...that would totally make me your little brother.”

“Are you still worried about what happened before?”

It was when we entered the kid’s zone. A lady staff member was briefly explaining the facility, but at the end she looked at Aki and Urano and said, “Okay, you two. Listen to your big sister and have fun playing.” Apparently, the staff member mistook us for siblings, with me as the eldest daughter and Urano and Aki as my younger brothers. Plus, judging from the tone of her voice, there was a high probability that she thought Urano was about the age of an elementary schooler.

“Aren’t you glad you look so young?”

“I’m not happy about it...”

And so, to my grumpy classmate, I said, “You don’t have to pout so much

about it. I know that you're a fine young man."

"..."

"Thanks for hanging out with me today."

"It was nothing..." Urano put on his hat and wore it low to hide his face.

Jeez, he just can't be honest. "Let's hang out again, okay?"

"Huh?"

"What? You had a lot of fun, didn't you?"

"I mean, I had fun..."

"Well, then why not? It's decided. We're going to hang out again." When I made my announcement, for some reason Urano was really flustered.

"Y-You... No, I mean, it's one thing for us to meet up by chance and hang out, but... If we make a promise for the two of us to hang out together, then that makes it a date..."

"What? What do you mean about the two of us? I'm talking about the three of us, of course. Aki seems to have taken a liking to you. Next time my parents have me babysit, I'll give you a call too. If you're free, help me out."

"..."

"Huh? W-Wait, Urano! Why are you walking so fast all of a sudden?!"

"Shut up. Don't talk to me."

I chased after Urano in a panic since, for some reason, he was in a bad mood all of a sudden.

Hmm. Like always, this guy is a pain in the butt, and I don't really get him.

♥Chapter 5

The Princess Wants to Act Motherly

It was in the evening, a few days after my sister had come to stay over at my house. The two of us were eating dinner together while the TV was on in the background when I heard something that caught my attention. Playing on the television was a typical roundtable discussion-style variety show where a bunch of different celebrities were talking about their views on love. A male celebrity started talking about “the charm of an older woman,” and then the program began a special report on “the charm of an older girlfriend.”

“Wow... Hey look, Onee-chan. It looks like older girlfriends are all the rage right now.” I couldn’t help getting sucked up in the television program. With a twelve-year age gap firmly cementing me as an older girlfriend, I couldn’t help but be interested in this kind of topic. “They’re saying that the number of guys looking for an older girlfriend is on the rise. Wow, is that true?”

On the show, they were talking about the various charms of an older woman like “They’re calm,” “They’re accepting,” and “They’re motherly.”

“Hmm, I see,” I declared. “Yeah, this is the age of older women. Older women just have a certain charm that younger women don’t.”

As someone who was currently an older girlfriend, I couldn’t help smiling. It felt like I was being affirmed. Normally, there were a lot of times where I’d get depressed because of our age gap, so occasionally seeing news like this picked me right up.

“Men want a woman who is motherly, after all,” I continued. “That’s why an older woman with a strong maternal side is the best.”

“I agree,” my sister concurred. “These days, men are all pretty tired. I feel like there’s a lot of people looking for a healing or motherly side in a woman.”

“That’s right. I think that overall, Japan is too into young girls. Male idols are still very active even after they’re forty years old, while female idols retire as soon as they reach their mid-twenties. The heroines in manga and anime are all

teenagers. We may still be holding onto the values of a time when it was considered the norm for women to marry in their teens, but things have long since changed..." I wanted to affirm myself so much that I couldn't help but to expand the scope of the conversation.

Then, my sister, in a very normal tone and like she was stating a well-known fact said, "But Hime, you're not motherly at all."

"..."

Huh?

"Can you believe my sister said something so horrible?!" After dinner, when my sister went to take a bath, I couldn't resist calling Yuki-chan and venting my frustrations to her. "I can't believe my sister! Just because she's got a little bit of that mature and sexy thing going on, she treats people like children!"

"..."

"Oh, I get it. My sister is definitely still holding a grudge from when I called her a slutty milf the other day. That's why she said something that she doesn't believe to make fun of me."

"...Hey, Hime." As I couldn't stop complaining, Yuki-chan asked me in a cold voice, "Just so we're on the same page: did you actually think you were motherly?"

"...What?"

Huh? What's with her reaction? I totally thought she'd agree with me and comfort me, but I'm getting a much colder and harsher response than I expected.

"Do I think I'm motherly? ...I-I am, aren't I? After all, I'm already twenty-seven years old, and I'm a grown woman. I couldn't hide my maternal side that's unique to grown women even if I tried..."

"You don't have one," Yuki-chan said in an assertive tone. "Hime. Relax and listen to me without forgetting to breathe. You, unfortunately, don't have a maternal side." Her voice was cold, yet she spoke like she was trying to gently persuade me. Indeed, her words were callous, yet they were filled with

compassion, like she was saying to an android who thought it was a human, “You’re not human, you’re a machine.”

“Huh? I don’t?”

“No, you don’t.”

“I don’t have a maternal side?”

“Nope.”

“N-No... You’re lying...” I was so shocked I felt like I was going to drop my phone.

I don’t have a maternal side? If Yuki-chan and my sister are both saying it, does that mean it’s common knowledge among everyone who knows me?

“On the other hand, I’m curious. Just what kind of maternal side did you think you had?”

“I...” I thought it over...and nothing came to mind. *Huh? What? Just what is maternal instinct in the first place?*

“Those charms of an older girlfriend that TV show brought up... They were ‘They’re calm,’ ‘They’re accepting,’ and ‘They’re motherly,’ right?”

“Y-Yes.”

“You probably don’t have any of those, Hime.”

“I don’t have any of them?!”

I’m not just lacking a maternal side, but I’m also not calm or accepting?! I don’t have any of the charm of an older girlfriend?!

“B-But! When I interact with you or my sister, I definitely act childish in a lot of ways, I think. The two of you are mature and calm, so, relatively speaking, that makes me seem more childish, I mean. But when I’m with Momota-kun, I’m sure I give off the charm of an older woman!”

“That’s certainly true. Humans do change their personality based on the person they’re dealing with or the group they belong to. It’s natural for someone’s attitude to be different when they’re with their lover versus when they’re with their friends. The Hime I know and the Hime that Momota-kun

knows are probably like two different people,” Yuki-chan said, seemingly agreeing with me. However, she then continued and said, “However, from all the bragging about your love life I’ve heard so far, I can’t help but think your maternal side is nonexistent when you’re with Momota-kun.”

“‘B-Bragging about my love life’?”

“What’s the thing that Momota-kun has done for you recently that made you most happy?”

“Well, I told you about it before, but I think it was when I came home tired from work and Momota-kun surprised me by making me dinner. Even though I totally forgot about our date because of work, he didn’t get upset at all and praised me by saying, ‘Good job at work!’ Momota-kun is always so kind! When I’m tired from work and stuff, it really makes me feel better when he pats my head and—Oh!”

“You realized it, huh?” As I was bragging the way I usually do, I realized it. I totally realized it.

“Hime. You’re being spoiled.”

“S-Spoiled...”

“Yes. You, a twenty-seven-year-old, are being spoiled by a fifteen-year-old boy,” Yuki-chan stated matter-of-factly.

A twenty-seven-year-old woman is being spoiled by a fifteen-year-old boy. It’s like...the impact of those words is amazing.

“If we’re talking about being calm and accepting, then Momota-kun is way more like that than you are, Hime.”

“N-No way...”

“Instead of you showing off your motherliness, Momota-kun is probably showing off *his* motherliness. No... He’s showing off his fatherliness.”

“Fatherliness?!”

“Your childishness and immaturity are tickling his paternal instincts.”

“Paternal instincts?!”

What are those? I'm tickling something like that? Am I making Momota-kun, a fifteen-year-old boy, feel paternal? Am I a little girl? Even though I'm twenty-seven, am I still a little girl on the inside?! Do I have the body of an adult but the mind of a little girl?!

"If I'm speaking honestly, when you and he started dating, I thought it definitely wouldn't work out. No matter how you look at it, to people our age a fifteen-year-old boyfriend just looks like a kid. I thought before long, you'd feel like you couldn't rely on him as a man. However, now my way of thinking has flipped one-hundred-eighty degrees. Momota-kun is far more manly and reliable than I thought he'd be...and you're far more unreliable and childish than I thought you'd be."

"..."

"You guys' relationship is basically built on Momota-kun's sincerity and accepting nature."

"..."

"Oh, it's not like I'm trying to judge. It's like I'm always telling you: couples and spouses come in all shapes sizes, so there's no correct one. It's just that it's ridiculous how you thought that you were motherly."

I couldn't say anything. I couldn't even hold up my smartphone, and my arm collapsed to my side. It was like my heart had been blown to pieces from having the shocking truth that I was completely oblivious to thrust before me in such deliberately logical fashion. The truth was that I was an older girlfriend who wasn't motherly.

Just as I was feeling like I would collapse from the shock, I declared, "I-I have to do something." I was somehow able to stand my ground at the last second, and I desperately mustered my resolve. "I can still do this...probably! Even if I was no good up until now, if I can somehow make up for it from here...!"

Even I have pride in being an older person. I still have some left. Even if being older than my boyfriend is something I'm a bit sensitive about, I couldn't stand it if I didn't even have the charm of an older girlfriend.

It's not too late! Somehow, I'll show off my motherly side! I'll really show off

my charm as an older woman, starting with my date tomorrow!



Orihara-san said that she had the evening off today, so the two of us were going to have a karaoke date.

It had been a few days since I went to karaoke with Kisaki-san. Even though she was my girlfriend's older sister, a part of me felt uneasy about going to karaoke alone with a woman other than my girlfriend. It probably wasn't necessary to tell Orihara-san about it, but even still, it felt unnatural to hide it, so I ended up letting her know. Of course, Orihara-san didn't get upset; in fact, she suggested, "Well, let's go too sometime."

I asked her to come pick me up at a nearby convenience store, and we headed for a karaoke place with a parking lot along the national highway. It was our first time going to karaoke together. I was a little nervous and embarrassed, but...all of those feelings were blown away by how awkward she was.

"...Wh-What's wrong?"

"What do you mean 'what's wrong?'"

"I mean... Like, you're kind of acting strange."

"My, how rude! What makes you think I'm acting strange?"

"..."

"Tee-hee. You're always so cheerful, Momota-kun." Orihara-san, who was sitting on the corner of the sofa in our karaoke booth, had her hand over her mouth and was smiling ladylike. Her smile was like the one an affectionate mother would have.

She'd been like this since she picked me up in her car. Her tone and attitude were unnaturally calm and a little flirtatious. It was like she was trying to look like an adult or be mature. In any case, Orihara-san wasn't like her usual self. I've never been to one, but I'm guessing this is what women who wear kimonos and work at a snack pub are like.

"Did you eat something funny?"

"I haven't."

“So, are you upset? Did I do something to make you mad?”

“No? I’m not upset.”

“Oh. So you’re doing an impersonation of Kisaki-san?”

“No, not at all. Aren’t I always like this?”

“...”

As I stared at Orihara-san, her smile froze, and she began to break out into a cold sweat. “...Who am I kidding? I’m sorry. Forget it. Forget all of it,” she said like she had lost her patience, and she hung her head, crestfallen.

The look on her face was a mixture of shame and disgrace. She covered her face with both hands and started to mumble as her depression overtook her. “I’m not... I can’t do it... I screwed up somewhere. Even though I know I messed up somewhere down the line, I didn’t want to acknowledge it and tried my best anyway...”

Wh-What is going on with her?

“Um...”

“Don’t worry. Don’t worry, I’m fine! Pretend that none of this happened!”

“Okay, I see...” I was concerned about her, but I decided not to pursue it too deeply. There was obviously something going on that only she could understand.

Well, I’m glad that she’s turning back to normal... Or so I had thought.

“First, shall we order something to drink?” I asked. “It seems like you have to order at least one drink per person here.”

“Oh, I’ll order! Leave it to me!” As soon as she said that, Orihara-san sprung right up and flew toward the phone on the wall of the booth.

“Th-Thanks, but...”

“It’s okay. You just stay seated, Momota-kun. Leave these kinds of details to me, the adult. I’m not a selfish woman who tries to get her boyfriend to do everything for her.”

“That’s fine...but it looks like this is the kind of karaoke place where you order

using a touchscreen remote.”

“Oh... I-I see.” Embarrassed, Orihara-san came back to the sofa, and we looked at the touchscreen together. “Okay then, I’ll order for you. Hmm... Huh? What’s going on? The screen changed...”

“It’s all right. If you push here, it’ll go back. Also, if you push here, it’ll change to the drink menu. Are you okay with oolong tea to drink?”

“Oh. Y-Yes.” Since Orihara-san was at her wit’s end, I used the touch panel to order drinks for the two of us. “I-I’m sorry, I haven’t gone to karaoke in a really long time, so I have no idea how things work...”

“It’s fine. But what’s wrong? You seem really anxious.”

“Do I really seem anxious?!” I was worried about her, but for some reason that made Orihara-san terribly shocked.

“Well... Yeah, you do.” I agreed with her because she was clearly acting strange today, but...

“I-I see. I guess I don’t seem calm after all...”

...there seemed to be no end to her depression. And yet, rather than simply being depressed, it seemed like she was trying to confirm something as well. She squeezed her fists like she was hardening her resolve, and in a small voice she whispered, “More... I have to show off my adult side more.”

“Um... I don’t really get what you mean, but how about we sing since we can only be here for so long? We can decide who goes first with rock-paper-scissors...”

“No, I’m done with stuff like karaoke.”

“...Huh?”

“I mean, I’m already a full-grown adult. I feel like I’m past the age where I can get excited about karaoke.”

“...What?” *Then why did you come? If anything, I came here because you said you wanted to go to karaoke.* “What’s wrong, really? When we first talked about going to karaoke, you were so enthusiastic about it.”

“N-No, I wasn’t!”

“You were excited to sing all of the opening songs for Heisei Kamen Rider, weren’t you?”

“N-No way! I’m already a grown adult, so I don’t sing stuff like the openings to tokusatsu shows. I’m not going to do ‘Excite,’ okay?”

“You said that you like ‘Tales’ songs, so I researched groups like Do As Infinity for today, Orihara-san.”

“I-I don’t know those... I don’t know any songs from video games.”

“Well then, what are you going to sing at karaoke, Orihara-san?”

“E-Enka...”

“Enka?!”

Orihara-san likes enka?! This is the first I’m hearing about it!

“W-Well, when you get to be an adult my age, you come to like enka. Enka requires mature taste, after all.”

“Oh, I see. Which singers do you listen to?”

“Um... You know, people like Sabu-chan?”

“Oh, that famous singer.”

“Yes, him. After all, when it comes to enka, you can’t forget about Sabu-chan. Sabu-chan’s... Um... ‘Kitasan Black’ is a really good song, I think.”

“Isn’t that the name of a horse?”

“By the way, Momota-kun! How have things been lately?!” Orihara-san said, abruptly changing the topic. It felt like she was aggressively trying to cover something up.

“How have things been lately? What’s with such a broad question?”

“I-I just thought that if there was anything you were worried about, I could give you advice as an adult. How’s school been lately?”

“School? We’re on summer break right now.”

“Oh, right, summer break... W-Well then, what about your summer vacation

homework?! You're not letting it pile up, are you?"

"My summer vacation homework—"

"A student's duty is to study, so you need to not get too carried away because it's summer break and properly do your schoolwork. When you become an adult, the ability to make a plan to finish these types kinds of long-term assignments according to schedule will be especially important—"

"I already finished it."

"You're finished?! Why?!"

"Why? Because I planned it out."

"Why did you plan it out?! Momota-kun, why are you so mature?!" Orihara-san said with tears in her eyes.

That's strange. Why is she getting mad at me for finishing my summer homework with good time management?

"Grr... This is no good. This is no good at all. At this rate, I'll have to use that..." After Orihara-san anxiously muttered to herself, she quickly turned to face me and straightened her posture. Then, with a nervous look on her face, she gently spread her arms and said, "C-Come here. I'll let you lay on my lap..."

"..." I was more confused than excited. *Why? Why did all this lead to her letting me lay on her lap?*

"H-Hey, come over here. Don't be shy."

"I'm not being shy. Wh-Why do you want me to lay on your lap?"

"No particular reason. It's just that I thought I'd help you recover from your daily fatigue. G-Guys like this sort of thing, right?"

"I don't hate it, but..."

"Or is it that you wouldn't like my lap pillow? It wouldn't make you feel relaxed? Am I not caring enough that my lap pillow would make you happy?"

"N-No, I'm happy! I'm incredibly happy you offered it to me!" Her face looked like she was going to cry at any moment, so I quickly gave her a big nod. It looked like things wouldn't be settled unless I did something, so I made up my

mind and moved closer to her. “Okay then... Here I go.”

“P-Please, go ahead.” The mood was awkward, but I slowly bent over and brought my head close to her until my face touched her thighs anyway.

Whoa. What’s going on? This is awesome! When Orihara-san came to my room before, somehow things led to me touching her thigh, but the feeling of my head versus my hand was completely different. Her thighs peeking out from her shorts were directly touching my head. I could feel the heat of her body on my ear and cheek, and it felt like it was going to melt my brain. Also, her thighs weren’t the only amazing thing...

“H-How is it, Momota-kun? Is it helping you recover? Do you feel calmed down?”

“...I feel like it’s making me the exact opposite of calm.”

“Huh? What’d you say?” It seemed like Orihara-san was having a hard time hearing me, so she bent forward to look at me. If this were normal—if we were a normal couple—her behavior would probably be natural, and there wouldn’t be an issue. Peering down at someone while letting them lay on your lap is a totally normal thing to do. However, since the one doing it was the one and only Orihara-san...there was a squish as her huge breasts touched my head. No, I wasn’t just being touched: I was being squeezed. A soft mass was pressing down on one side of my head, while the other side of my head was being supported by her thigh. I had nowhere to run. Above me were boobs and below me were thighs as I was sandwiched between her tender flesh.

“Hnn?!” We were both surprised by the sensation, and Orihara-san quickly straightened herself up, releasing my head from the pressure. “I-I’m sorry Momota-kun. It hurt, didn’t it? I wasn’t trying to do it on purpose...”

“I-I know. I’m okay...” I looked up at her as I spoke, but two massive lumps were blocking my view, so I could only see half of her face.

They’re huge, truly huge. I’ve always thought they were huge, but seeing them up close like this, the impact is just too amazing.

“I’m really sorry. They’re so pointlessly huge that they always get in the way somehow...”

“No. There’s nothing wrong with them being big. In fact, it’s...”

“Huh? What’s that?” It seemed like she was having trouble hearing me again, and my head was caught in another breast and thigh sandwich.

“Hah?!” We were both once again surprised as we did a repeat of what we had just done. *Is this a running gag or something?*

“I-I’m sorry. I did it again...”

“I-It’s okay. It was by no means unpleasant, so...”

“Huh? What’s that?”

“No, no! It’s fine!” I said, stopping it before it happened a third time. Between the noisy karaoke booth, my voice shrinking from embarrassment, and Oriharasan’s massive breasts being between us, there were many reasons for my voice being hard to hear, and it almost caused a horrible infinite loop.



That's strange... Was sleeping on someone's lap always such an erotic activity? I thought it was a wholesome, heartwarming activity that you could show on broadcast television without issue. How did something like this become so dirty?

"Um, Orihara-san? I should..." I felt like my sanity was about to reach its limit, so I slowly tried to sit up, but my shoulders were held down by a panicking Orihara-san.

"N-No, don't! You haven't been able to lay down on my lap at all."

"But..."

"You don't like this after all? Can you not let go of your fatigue lying down on the lap of a woman like me? Am I not calm enough?"

"No, it's not that. I'm just..."

"Y-You don't have to be in such a hurry, do you? You can lay down for a little bit..."

"But I really think I'm almost at my limit."

"Limit? What limit?"

"No, I mean..."

"Huh? What's that?" It looked like Orihara-san was going to lean over again, so I quickly opened my mouth to give a reason (aside from being at the edge of my sanity) for getting off her lap.

"The staff should be coming with our drinks soon—" In the middle of my sentence, there was a knock on the door immediately followed by it being opened.

"Pardon me. Here are your drinks..." A lethargic-looking male waiter who seemed like a college student started to speak as he entered the booth, but he froze when he saw us. The way the two of us were wrestling around—me trying to escape her lap pillow as she held me down—must have made us look like a really flirty couple.

The silver lining in all of this was the male waiter's very calm response. For

just a moment, he froze like he was surprised, but after that he placed down our drinks like nothing happened and completely ignored what we were doing.

I think he was probably used to seeing this type of thing. I've heard that a lot of couples get touchy-feely inside of karaoke booths, so, in a way, it was probably something the staff sees every day. I've heard rumors that there are people who do way more explicit stuff, so a lap pillow probably didn't even make him feel like paying us any mind.

Still, even if the waiter was used to it, we weren't used to it at all. Having our flirting witnessed by a third person caused serious damage to our psyches and killed the mood. Orihara-san was especially depressed since she felt responsible for suggesting the lap pillow in the first place. However, the heavy mood gradually made us start talking about the reason for Orihara-san's strange behavior today.

"You wanted to act motherly?"

"Yes..." Orihara-san said, embarrassed as she nodded while facing downward. It seemed that all of her unnatural behavior was because she wanted to "act motherly."

"Why did you want to act motherly?"

"B-Because my sister and Yuki-chan both told me that I'm not motherly. But when I thought about it, I realized a lot of what they were saying was true, so...I wanted to change that. Even though I'm twelve years older than you, I'm not calm, accepting, or motherly. I'm older than you, but I don't have any of the charm of an older girlfriend. It's pathetic, right?"

"Ha ha. You were worried about something like that?"

"Hey! Don't laugh! That's horrible! I was really worried about it!" I felt bad, but I couldn't help laughing. I understood that Orihara-san was serious, and those feelings reached me well enough that it warmed my heart.

"H-Hey, Momota-kun, do you think I'm not motherly either?"

"That's... Yeah, I don't."

"Oh no, that's what I thought..."

“But it’s not like I was hoping for an older girlfriend.” I was embarrassed, but I spoke my mind. “I don’t love older women. I love you, Orihara-san.”

“...”

“It’s true that I don’t find you very motherly. But you have a lot of other charming qualities, and those are what I love about you.”

“Momota-kun...”

“So, you don’t have to try so hard. You’re wonderful just the way you are, Orihara-san.”

“...Thank you,” Orihara-san said, smiling happily. I reached out my hand and stroked her head like I always do. Her eyes narrowed like it tickled, but suddenly...

“Ah?!”

Partway through, she opened her eyes like she had come back to her senses and ran away from my hand. She had a complicated expression on her face and looked like she was at her wit’s end.

“No, this is all wrong! This is totally paternal! I went out of control again, and you solved the problem by being so accepting of me!”

“Huh?”

“I’m totally the one who’s the kid in this situation! I mean, I’m already like your daughter. Just now, it was totally like when the daughter messes up and her dad cheers her up by telling her, ‘You’re fine just the way you are’!”

“...”

“Waah, why am I so childish? No matter what I do, I just can’t grow up...”

“...” Just when things seemed like they were going to wrap up nicely, the conversation returned to square one.

I don’t know what to do here. I probably shouldn’t say this, but I just want to say one thing: This was a pain in the butt. Like always, my older girlfriend was annoying but cute. However, she really was being a bit of a pain in the butt.



“That’s why it was impossible for me to act motherly.” After our karaoke date was over and I had dropped Momota-kun off at the usual convenience store, I made a phone call to Yuki-chan.

“Oh, really? That’s unfortunate.”

“However, I did everything I could, so I feel better, surprisingly. They’re right when they say it’s better to regret something you did than to not do something and regret it.”

“...From what you’re telling me, I don’t really understand why you’re feeling so satisfied. It just sounds like you got off track and made a fool of yourself.”

“I-It’s fine! He told me that he likes me this way, so it’s fine!” After I brute-forced my way through the conversation, I gave a deep sigh.

After the whole lap pillow thing, Momota-kun and I talked a lot of things over, and there was plenty of agonizing on my end. In the end, I gave up on the whole idea of being motherly. I totally forgot about the charms of an older lady or whatever, went back to being my usual self, and enjoyed karaoke with Momota-kun.

It sure was fun. We had so much fun that it made me wonder just what that mess was in the beginning. I shouldn’t have thought about that other stuff and just acted normal...

“I’m going to give up on things like the charms of an older woman and acting motherly,” I told Yuki-chan. “It looks like I can’t manage it, and Momota-kun doesn’t seem to be looking for that kind of thing either.”

“Well, that probably suits you guys more. Being motherly isn’t something you can force in the first place. It’s something that reveals itself naturally depending on the person you’re—” She stopped mid-sentence.

“Huh? What’s wrong, Yuki-chan?”

“No...” There was a brief silence like she was thinking something over, and then said, “Maybe it’s the other way around.”

“The other way around? Wh-What’s the other way around?”

“It might have been Momota-kun’s problem and not yours.”

“...Huh? What was the problem?”

“I mean, Momota-kun is a really good boyfriend.”

“Th-Thank you?” I had no idea what her mysterious words meant. I wouldn’t understand what Yuki-chan meant by “good boyfriend” until Momota-kun and I went to the summer festival. That’s where I would get to know a new side of him. It would be the first time I met the side of Momota-kun that isn’t a “good boyfriend.”

≡Chapter 6

The Princess Goes to the Summer Festival

What seemed like a long, long summer break had only three days left; Orihara-san and I were discussing it over the phone.

“Summer is already over...”

“That’s true...”

“It went by quickly, huh?”

“It really did...” As I nodded to the voice on the phone, I laid out on my bed and stared at the ceiling of my room. A lot happened during this summer break, but now that it was almost over it felt like everything happened in the blink of an eye.

“It’s like... I feel satisfied. Up until now, my summers have just been spent playing video games by myself in an air-conditioned room,” Orihara-san said, sounding like she was getting lost in thought. “For me, this is the first summer I’ve ever had a boyfriend, and thanks to you, I had a lot of fun.”

“It’s the same for me.” It was also my first summer having a girlfriend. We had no idea what we were doing, and that’s why it was so different and fun.

“Sigh... If I were a student and had an actual summer break, we could have had more fun. I’m sorry I couldn’t take any time off at all.”

“No, it was enough. Rather, I’m sorry that I made you spend all of your time off with me.”

“No, it was no problem! Actually, it was more like you were healing my daily fatigue...”

“Really? I make you feel better?” *I feel weird saying this, but I don’t think I have the kind of looks or personality that comforts people.*

“Yes, you make me feel so much better that I want to be together every day.” Hearing her say that made me feel embarrassed. I imagined her being

embarrassed too, and for a few seconds there was silence. That's when the sound of taiko drums came through the window I'd opened to air out my room.

"Is that sound taiko drums?" Orihara was apparently able to hear them on her end of the phone as well.

"Yeah, the Preservation Society has been practicing in my neighborhood for the summer festival the day after tomorrow."

"The summer festival... Oh, now that you mention it, I heard that the summer festival in the city was postponed because of rain." Every year, a summer festival is held at a shrine in the city, and normally it would be in the middle of August. However, on the day it was scheduled this year, the prefecture was hit with a heavy, record-breaking amount of rain, and the festival was postponed until now.

"Do you go to the summer festivals, Momota-kun?"

"No, I don't. I went when I was a kid, but lately, I don't go at all."

"I see. I had the impression that high schoolers often go to festivals. You don't get invited by Kana-kun or Ura-kun?"

"I don't... Kana usually goes with who he's dating at the time."

"Wow, that sure sounds like Kana-kun."

"Ura has this prejudice against festivals where he says, 'I don't know what kind of idiot pays such ridiculous prices for unsanitary and low-quality food made by amateurs.'"

"...Wow, that sure sounds like Ura-kun."

"Well, there's also the fact that Ura hates crowds. How about you, Orihara-san? Do you go to summer festivals?"

"I don't go either. I used to go to the local festival when I was in elementary school, but ever since middle school, I've been the type to stay indoors and play video games... Even after I became an adult and started living in this apartment, I haven't been to the nearby summer festival even once."

"Is that right...?" *Well, that's the type of person that Orihara-san is, I guess. I can't really imagine her taking her friends to have fun at a summer festival.*

After we'd felt each other out, Orihara-san broke the ice and said, "If you'd like...why don't we go to the summer festival together?"

"To the summer festival?" I was surprised by the unexpected invitation—after all, I was just about to ask her myself. Just as I was trying to figure out how to say it, Orihara-san managed to do it first.

"Y-You don't want to?"

"No, I do! I really do! I was thinking about inviting you just now."

"Really?! I'm glad. Well, let's go together!"

"But I wonder if it will be all right..." I said, letting my anxiety spill over and be put into words.

To tell the truth, I've been planning a date to the summer festival with Orihara-san for a while now. However, I was hesitating right before I asked her to go. For one thing, I was worried that Orihara-san might not like those kinds of events. It was safe to say that this concern had been put to rest since she was the one to invite me. However, the other reason I didn't ask her was that...

"If we go somewhere with a lot of people, there's a strong possibility that we'll run into somebody we know..." I explained.

The age difference between Orihara-san and I is twelve years. She's twenty-seven years old, and I'm fifteen years old. She's an adult with a job, and I'm a minor in high school. In the eyes of the world, our love was probably unacceptable. If you removed subjectivity from the equation and looked at our relationship objectively, it would probably look like an adult woman was involved in sexual misconduct with a young high schooler. In the event that our relationship was brought to light, there's no telling how severely we'd be scorned by society. Since I'm the minor, I probably wouldn't have much happen to me, but I was afraid I'd cause a lot of trouble for Orihara-san. That was why we had to keep our relationship a secret from those around us...

That said, I felt like we'd been pretty loose with doing that lately. *My friends already know about us, and my sister found out about us too. I used to be really nervous about whether or not there were signs of people close by before I entered Orihara-san's apartment, but lately I don't really worry about it...*

Yeah, that's no good. Well, if we get spotted in town, I guess we can play it off with the "We're relatives" strategy. However, there's a strong possibility that two of us going to the festival together would make us seem too close to be relatives.

All that made me hesitant to ask Orihara-san to the festival, but she also said, "Yeah... I was worried too, and I was thinking there'd be a big risk of being seen by someone. But what if you think about it the other way around?"

"The other way around?"

"They say 'If you want to hide a tree, put it in a forest.' The more people there are, the more a couple like us won't stand out, don't you think?"

"I wonder about that..." For a second, I thought she had a point, but when I thought about it rationally, I felt like it was way too wishful.

"B-But... I thought up a secret plan to keep us from being recognized, so it should be okay."

"A secret plan? What is it?"

"You'll see once we're at the festival."

I wasn't sure why she was speaking so mysteriously. A secret plan by Orihara-san... I have a bad feeling about this. No, I shouldn't doubt her right off the bat. What kind of boyfriend doubts his own girlfriend?

"Okay," I replied. "In that case...shall we go to the summer festival together?"

"Yes, let's go. I'm looking forward to it! To be honest, until now I haven't really been interested in things like summer festivals, but if you're there, I know it'll be fun," Orihara-san said, sounding genuinely happy.

"Orihara-san..." Being told that in such a happy voice, a feeling of happiness spread through my chest.

If she's this happy, I don't have the option of saying no. Now that we've decided to do it, we're going to have a lot to think about. For two summer festival amateurs like ourselves, going without any prior knowledge will probably just make the day really confusing. We have to research things like the paths around the festival, the locations of the toilets, and so forth.

Just as I started thinking about those kinds of things, I suddenly realized something and asked, “By the way, Orihara-san, will you wear a yukata?”

“Huh? I-I wonder if I should? I do have one I haven’t really worn. I had it bought for me years ago when my sister was having her yukata bought for her.” Orihara-san sounded troubled, and she asked me, “Do you...want to see my yukata, Momota-kun?”

“O-Of course I want to see it,” I answered excitedly without thinking. *Orihara-san’s yukata...of course I’d want to see something like that!*

“W-Well, if that’s the way it is, then I guess I’ll wear it.”

“Really?”

“B-But don’t really expect anything, okay? It was bought for me a long time ago, and the design is meant for young people. I’ll die from grief if people think I’m just some twenty-seven-year-old woman trying to look young...”

“I-It’ll be okay! I think you’ll even look pretty wearing a yukata, Orihara-san.”

“R-Really?”

“Of course I do.”

“...Okay, I’ll be sure to wear it then!” Orihara-san said, sounding embarrassed but happy. After that, we discussed things like where and what time we’d meet on the day of the festival, and then we ended our phone call.

“The summer festival, huh?” I mumbled to myself. As I was imagining the day’s plans and Orihara-san dressed in a yukata in my head, my smartphone vibrated. I looked at the screen and saw it was a text message from Orihara-san.

“I’m looking forward to the summer festival. It’s a little embarrassing, but I’ll put in the effort to wear my yukata. You can look forward to my yukata on the day of the festival, so make do with this for now. Well, goodnight!”

What followed the message was...shall I say, astonishing? Orihara-san sent me a selfie of herself in casual-looking pajamas. She was blushing shyly as she opened up her shirt with one hand, emphasizing her breasts. Her appearance was extreme and suggestive, and totally not like her usual self.



Ahhh! I sent it! What should I do? What should I do?! Jeez, the message changed to “read” so quickly! Which means... My embarrassing selfie is totally being looked at by Momota-kun!

What I sent was a selfie or, as it's commonly known in this case, a sexy selfie. A girlfriend sending suggestive selfies, like herself in a bikini or wearing pajamas, is apparently fairly common. I've always secretly looked down on it and called couples who do that type of thing stupid, but now here I was doing it too...

I sent my boyfriend a sexy selfie in my pajamas. What's more... I was explicitly showing off my breasts. I feel weird saying this, but I think it was pretty sexy. In fact, it was probably beyond sexy and even a little obscene...

“Waaaah! I've done it now!” While holding my phone, I rolled around on my bed, writhing in agony. *I wonder if I shouldn't have sent it... What am I going to do if he's cringing and thinking, “You actually did something this dirty?” According to what I read on the internet, a lot of boyfriends enjoy getting sexy selfies from their girlfriends, but there are some boyfriends who think it's “inappropriate and a turnoff.” What am I going to do if Momota-kun is one of them?!*

“He's not responding, so I wonder if he's turned off by it... Was it too awkward to get a sexy selfie from a woman pushing thirty?! Momota-kun, please say something—huh?!”

“He he. You seem like you're having a lot of fun, Hime-chan.” I felt someone's gaze and looked up, and there was my sister just out of the bath and grinning at me.

“Onee-chan...w-were you watching me?”

“I was. You gave me quite the show, making a fuss all by yourself like that.”

“...”

“It's nighttime, so it'd be best if you're not too loud, you know?”

I couldn't say anything because of how embarrassed I was. My big sister saw me making a huge commotion all by myself at the age of twenty-seven...

“Still... You were finally able to send that sexy selfie, huh?” my sister sighed. She spoke to me while she dried her hair with a bath towel while I shrank from embarrassment. “You’ve been working at it for three days. You retook it over and over again, putting on your bra and taking off your bra. And even when you took a good picture, you’d angst over it without being able to send it.”

“Wh-Why do you know all that, Onee-chan?!”

“I know because we’re living together,” she said, sounding fed up.

Oh man... This is embarrassing. I meant to do it in secret without my big sister knowing about it, but she knows everything. “He he he. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Back when I was in high school, I did stupid stuff like that too.”

“Is that supposed to cheer me up?” She just told me it was stupid though! Also, I get the feeling she was indirectly dissing me by saying it was something that’s okay for high schoolers to do.

“Did Momota-kun ask you to send it to him?”

“N-No. I sent it voluntarily...”

“Oh, really? I thought for sure that Momota-kun told you to send him a sexy picture of yourself. Young guys are quick to say stuff like that, after all.”

“Momota-kun would never say something like that! Momota-kun is different from guys who demand that kind of weird stuff. He’s a good boyfriend who’s kind, sincere, and always takes care of me...” I suddenly remembered the conversation from the other day and Yuki-chan’s meaningful words, “Momota-kun is a very good boyfriend.” It felt like those words had been stuck in the back of my throat this entire time. *Just what do they mean, I wonder...*

“Hime-chan?”

“...No, it’s nothing. Oh, Onee-chan, the day after tomorrow, I’m going with Momota-kun to the summer festival, so can you help me get dressed?”

“Oh, that sounds like fun. Okay, just leave it to your big sister.” As I got her approval, my phone vibrated. It was Momota-kun’s reply to my sexy selfie. Very nervously, I looked at my screen. What he sent me wasn’t a text...but a sticker

of a cute character saying, “Thanks for the meal.”

Just what did he mean by this? Should I take it as a compliment? I was puzzled, but ten seconds later I got a long text from Momota-kun.

“I’m sorry. After thinking about it over and over, that stamp was the reply I came up with. However, it doesn’t feel right after all... I meant it as a joke. I’m not making fun of you at all. I’m incredibly happy to receive your selfie, but I’m not used to this kind of thing, so I didn’t know how to react—” was how his long apology and excuses started.

Hmm. It seems like my sexy selfie has really troubled him... I wanted him to be happy, but...from now on I think I’ll be more careful.



After two days had passed, the summer festival arrived. I rode on my bicycle to the park at the foot of the mountain where we had agreed to meet up. Orihara-san said she was going to take the bus to get there.

The time was a little bit before six o’clock. Even though the days were longer because of it being summer, the surroundings were starting to get dark.

The shrine where the festival was being held was on a mountainside less than three hundred meters above sea level. It was a symbolic tourist spot for this area; it’s crowded with people flower-viewing in the spring and during the summer festival in the summer.

As I got closer to the mountain, countless lights that seemed to be from the festival came into view, and I could even hear lively festival music. I parked my bike at the special parking lot designated for bicycles and walked to the park at the foot of the mountain. However, my pace naturally changed to a run. We were meeting up at six o’clock, and I had arrived ten minutes early, but she was already there waiting for me.

“Oh, Momota-kun.” Orihara-san was standing at the entrance, and when she noticed me, she raised her voice. However... I couldn’t say a word. I gradually stopped running and I stopped in front of her. I just stood there speechless and stunned. She was beautiful. The design of her yukata was purple blooming morning glories on a white background. Her Japanese-style clogs were the kind

with a red clog thong. Her hair was put up high, exposing the nape of her neck. She gave off an impression of purity and simplicity, yet there was also a hint of mature seductiveness. *Orihara-san in a yukata is just too beautiful.* “M-Momota-kun, what’s wrong?”

“Oh. I’m sorry... I couldn’t take my eyes off of you.”

“C-Come on, you don’t need to flatter me...”

“It’s not flattery! Honestly... It looks really good on you. You’re beautiful, Orihara-san.”

“R-Really?” Orihara-san blushed bright red and hid her face in her hands. “It doesn’t look weird, does it? It was bought for me when I was in my early twenties, so it’s meant for a much younger girl. I don’t look like I’m trying to appear young, do I?”

“You’re fine. There’s no problem at all, and you look absolutely beautiful.”

“D-Do I? Well, I’m glad.” She nodded, embarrassed but relieved. I really wasn’t trying to flatter her; I honestly thought she was beautiful. It was worth coming to the summer festival just to be able to see her like that.

“Um... Shall we go? Oh, yeah. Orihara-san, didn’t you say the other day you had a secret plan for hiding our identities?”

“Oh, that’s right.” Orihara-san held up what she was holding in her hand. “He he he. I bought these a little earlier.” What she was so proudly showing off...was two masks.



They were the kinds of character masks they sell at the festival stalls. Also, the design was for a Kamen Rider from the year before last. “If we wear these, no one will know who we are, right? Plus, it’s totally not unnatural to wear a mask at a festival. Isn’t this an awesome secret plan?”

“...”

“Huh? Momota-kun, what’s with that cold look in your eyes?”

“It’s nothing...”

Of course I’d look like this. I felt disappointed that this was the plan after she hyped it up so much, but I also felt relieved that she didn’t say anything too weird. There was a lot I wanted to comment on, but for the time being I said, “Orihara-san...you know you can’t walk around with a mask on, right?”

“What?”

“Apparently, it’s bad manners to walk around with your mask completely over your face like this.” I took a mask and imitated placing it over my face, and Orihara-san’s face turned to a puzzled expression.

“Huh? What? Why not?”

“They say it’s dangerous because of how poor the visibility is, and also because kids will run around while wearing them. Oh, it also says so over there.” I looked around, and on the side of a stall was a sign that said, “Don’t walk around with a mask on.” There was even an easy-to-understand picture attached to it.

“What?! No way! When I was a kid, we’d all run around while wearing masks...”

“A lot of things have gotten stricter lately. It seems like when you want to wear your mask while walking around, it’s good manners to wear it on the side of your head.”

“Jeez... I can’t believe I’m experiencing a generation gap in a place like this,” Orihara-san said, and her shoulders slumped.

Well, even if they say it’s prohibited, it’s not legally binding. It’s just about good manners. You probably wouldn’t be caught by the police if you actually

walked around while wearing a mask, but it'd be a shame if a grown adult were practicing bad manners in front of children. Though, manners aside, wearing those things and walking around is just embarrassing. If a big guy like me walked around with a character mask on, I'd look pretty suspicious.

"Wh-What should we do Momota-kun?"

"For now, let's wear the masks on the side of our heads. They should cover our faces a little bit..." I said as I put the mask on the side of my head. "Also, let's go with the usual 'We're relatives' strategy."

The "We're relatives strategy" is when we run into someone we know and force our way out of the situation by saying, "We're relatives." Whenever we meet each other close by where we live, we always keep this strategy in mind. Luckily, we've never had to use it yet. "If we don't hold hands or anything, I think we can fool everyone."

"...That's right. Let's do that." After nodding, Orihara-san put the other mask on the side of her head. Her yukata, which possessed a beauty like a completed painting, was instantly turned ridiculous by the *Kamen Rider* mask. It was a little disappointing, but this kind of unbalance was just like Orihara-san, and it made me feel a little relieved.

"Okay, let's go."

"Yeah... H-Hey," Orihara-san said and handed me one of the strings of the drawstring bag she had been carrying. "Why don't we...hold this together? There's a lot of people here, so it would be troublesome if we got separated... Plus, I think even relatives do stuff like this."

"Sounds good." I nodded and grabbed one of the drawstrings on her bag. "This is nice."

"Yeah. It's nice." We both showed each other the strings we were holding in our hands and smiled. I can't exactly explain it, but I was enjoying myself and felt happy. *It wouldn't be bad to hold hands like this from time to time. We have to be careful about even holding hands in front of people, but I feel like there are ways to have fun and be happy under such restrictions.* As we shared the strings of the bag, we walked into the midst of the festival.

The gentle light of paper lanterns lit up the summer night, and the gently sloping mountain road leading to the shrine was lined with many stalls on both of its sides. Stalls for octopus balls, soba noodles, crepes, shaved ice, lotteries, bouncy ball scooping, and many other festival-style stalls lined the paved road. The road between the stalls was jam-packed with tons of people, so we walked slowly as we weaved our way through the crowd.

“Wow, Momota-kun. It really is like a festival,” Orihara-san said with a carefree smile.

I thought her response was simple, but I felt the same way, so I nodded and said, “That’s true.” *What can I say? It really is just like a festival.* “If I’m walking too fast, please tell me, okay?” Today Orihara-san was dressed in a yukata and clogs, an outfit she wasn’t used to wearing, so I think it was pretty difficult for her to walk. Even under normal circumstances her stride is pretty different from mine, so today I had to be extra careful.

“Thank you. But this pace is fine.” She smiled and nodded at me, and we leisurely walked along, enjoying the scenery of the festival.

“Would you like something to eat?”

“Sure. What do you want to eat, Momota-kun?”

“I’m fine with anything.”

“I’m fine with anything too—” Orihara-san stopped and froze right in the middle of her sentence. Her gaze was fixed on a stall that was cooking octopus balls that gave off a delicious-sounding sizzle. “Wow... It looks so good.”

“Well, let’s have octopus balls.”

“...Huh? O-Oh, I’m sorry, it must have seemed like I was prompting you to choose it.”

“No, not at all.” We bought one pack of octopus balls from the vendor, found some space, and ate standing up.

“...It’s hot.”

“Are you okay?”

“Y-Yeah... It’s hot, but it’s delicious,” Orihara-san said as she covered her

mouth with her hand and smiled happily. I also brought an octopus ball to my mouth. Its crunchy surface was really fragrant, and it had a piping-hot and soft inside. It looked like we were lucky and got some that had just been cooked. “This kind of thing is nice. It’s like the atmosphere is delicious too,” Orihara-san said after she swallowed her octopus ball.

“It really does taste different than normal, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah...” Orihara-san nodded in agreement, and then a somber tone said, “It’s hard to believe that I put on a yukata, came to a festival, and am eating octopus balls. If I had never met you, I don’t think it would have ever crossed my mind.”

“...It’s the same for me too.” I’m not as bad as Ura, but I think a part of me was cynical about things like summer festivals, and I used to have bitter opinions like “I don’t get the point of going out into a crowd when it’s hot outside,” “The food at festival stalls is just expensive and doesn’t even taste good,” and “You can just watch fireworks on YouTube.”

However, when I finally got a girlfriend, I found myself enjoying a summer festival with her to the fullest and almost laughed at how ridiculously selfish I was.

As we walked around and looked at the stalls that were here and there, we leisurely climbed the mountain path until we came to the square in front of the shrine. It was a small open area surrounded by trees, and on a stage in the back were children wearing traditional happi coats preparing taiko drums.

“Huff, huff...”

“A-Are you okay?” I called out to Orihara-san. When we finished climbing the mountain path, she looked like she was having trouble breathing.

“I’m fine, I’m fine... I’m just a little tired. Ha ha. I really do need to exercise more...” She gave me a big smile, but her face looked pale. Though it was a mountain path, the slope was quite gentle, and I slowed my pace as much as I could. Even still, she was breathing really hard... I wondered if it was because she wasn’t used to her clogs.

“Do you want to sit down and rest somewhere?”

“N-No. I’m fine, really... I’m just going to go to the bathroom really quickly.”

“...Okay. Then I’ll just be waiting here,” I said, and Orihara-san walked to the public restroom in front of the shrine. I was worried about her, but since I couldn’t follow her, I waited for her to return by the entrance to the open area.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was six thirty. According to the festival’s program that I looked at on the internet, a taiko performance was going to start soon on the stage, and then after that there was going to be a small fireworks show. *If I leave in the middle of the taiko performance, I should be able to grab a good spot for us to watch the fireworks.* As I was going over my plan inside of my head, I heard a familiar voice call my name.

“Well, if it isn’t Momo.”

“Kana...and Uomi.” The couple of Kanao Haruka and Uomi Uta came walking toward me from the crowd. Kana was dressed stylishly in damaged jeans and a T-shirt, while Uomi wore a coolly-designed yukata that had drawings of goldfish on a white background. Also, she was holding a plastic bag that had a few goldfish swimming in it. “You guys came too, huh?”

“We did. Momo...you didn’t come alone, did you?” Kana said, looking a little taken aback.

“Wrong. I’m here with Orihara-san,” I shot back at him. “She’s just using the bathroom at the moment.”

“Oh, is that right? Thank goodness. I was worried that you were playing by yourself at the summer festival,” Kana said with a grimace.



As he did that Uomi said, “Look, Momota. These are the goldfish Haruka-kun caught for me,” while proudly showing me her goldfish.

“Wow. So, Kana caught these, huh?”

“They look tasty, right?”

“What?” I asked her without thinking.

Uomi, wearing her unreadable expression, responded with her uninterested tone. “That’s no good, Momota-kun. That was a joke just now, so you have to play the straight man.”

“O-Oh... That was a joke?”

“There’s no way I’d eat a goldfish.”

“S-Sorry.” For some reason, I apologized to her. I mean, I knew that there was no way that she’d eat a goldfish. However, Uomi had this unreadable part of her that makes you think for a second, “She might just eat this goldfish.” *I’m still not particularly good with this girl. It’s not that I hate her. I’m just not good with her.*

“Haruka-kun, I’m going to the bathroom too.” Completely unaware of my internal struggle, Uomi headed to the bathroom, leaving just Kana and me behind.

“You look like you’re enjoying yourself, Momo,” Kana said like he was teasing me and looked at my head. “Just look at your little mask.”

“...Shut up. It’s not like I put it on because I’m enjoying myself. I just put it on to hide my face.”

“Oh, I see. Forbidden love sure isn’t easy,” Kana chuckled like he was enjoying himself. “Oh yeah. Get this, Momo... I ran into Ura earlier.”

“Ura? That’s a shock. Who’d have thought he’d come to a festival?” *This should be the kind of event that he loathes...*

“I was surprised too. What’s more, he was with Saki-chan.”

“With Ibusuki?” *That’s even more of a shock.* “You mean the two of them came together?”

“No, not just the two of them. Saki-chan’s little brother was with them.”

“Her little brother...” *Now that I think about it, I remember Ibusuki having a little brother in preschool. I think he was there at the aquarium when we bumped into her there. I want to say his name was Aki-kun.*

“Her brother was really attached to Ura. They said that they ran into each other in town by accident and ended up hanging out together.”

“Really?”

“Well, Ura desperately tried to make excuses. He said, ‘I came here because Aki, not this woman, invited me. I came here to have fun with Aki, and not this woman!’”

“I see.”

“Still, even if he’s become close to her little brother, there’s no way that that alone would be enough to make Ura come to the summer festival.”

“That’s true. This is Ura we’re talking about.” *I realize we’re saying some pretty horrible things about him while he isn’t here, but I still had to agree. The guy who’s the most introverted of introverts showed up to the summer festival, the den of extroverts. It’s like a little miracle happened.*

“He he. I’m looking forward to the second semester. I wonder what’s going to happen to those two.” After talking so fondly about other peoples’ love lives, Kana bent over and touched his foot. “Hey, Momo. Do you have any medicine for bug bites on you? I just got bit by a mosquito.”

“Yeah, I do.” I took some cream for bug bites out of my shoulder bag and gave it to Kana.

“Thank you... I feel weird saying this since I was the one who asked, but I can’t believe you were carrying around medicine for bug bites...Whoa, what’s with that bag?” Kana said, shocked upon viewing the contents of my open bag.

“What do you have in there?”

“Um, I have...bug spray, tape for Orihara-san’s feet for when she hurts herself on the clogs she’s not used to, a sewing kit for when the clog thong stereotypically breaks, a notebook with a poem that I plan to read at the end of

the date when the fireworks reach their peak, and...a compress I was going to give Orihara-san at the very end of our date, because she's usually not very active and walking on clogs she's not used to, so I think she'll have muscle pain that'll interfere with her work tomorrow."

"W-Wow..." Kana said, looking taken aback. "Momo, are you always this thoroughly prepared?"

"Yeah, I usually have this much. It doesn't hurt to be prepared for the worst, and this is only natural for a boyfriend."

"No, that isn't natural..." Kana gave a tired smile and let out a small sigh. "What can I say? You're doing a really good job as a boyfriend, Momo," he said somewhat sarcastically. "It seems like you're taking very good care of Orihara-san."

"Hmm? You're supposed to cherish your girlfriend, right?"

"Well, that is true." Kana then put his hand on his chin like he was thinking about something. "Do you remember a long time ago in middle school when Ura got his parents to buy him that figure of that video game character? It was a really expensive figure that Ura got his parents to buy for him after begging his parents a lot."

"Oh, that one." My memory of the time frame was fuzzy, but I remember something like that happening.

"After Ura got his parents to buy him that figure he was super happy about it. He even invited us over just to brag about it, remember?"

"Oh yeah, he did." He called us all the way over to his house, and almost bragged us to death. Well, at the time, Kana and I were also hooked on that game, and we knew what Ura's personality was like, so we were simply happy to see the figure. "That takes me back. Didn't he brag about it while it was in the box?"

"That's right. It was still in the box." Then, with a meaningful tone, Kana said, "It was an expensive figure that could be put in all kinds of poses with lots of changeable parts, and it looked like a blast to play with. However, Ura never took it out of the box and just displayed it."

“That’s right, he didn’t...” My memories of that time quickly started to awaken. Ura bragged so much about that figure, but he never opened the box. He said, “I’m going to display it in the box!” and didn’t listen to us when we begged him not to. We said things like “Why?” “That doesn’t make sense!” and “Let’s make it do a bunch of poses and play with it!” However, in the end, Ura told us, “I don’t want to! Waaah!” and started to cry, and that was the end of that conversation.

“In the end, Ura had that box on display for about three years, didn’t he?”

“He probably did.”

“He wanted it for so long, and when he finally got his hands on that treasure, he left it in the box and just put it on display. He didn’t even touch it with his own hands because it was precious to him, and he wanted to take care of it.”

“That’s his personal choice, isn’t it? I mean, there’s tons of people in the world who enjoy collecting things like that.”

“Of course it is. But from the figure’s perspective, it’s quite the disagreeable situation, isn’t it? It has so many gimmicks and actions and was ready to entertain its owner, but it was never let out of the box and just turned into decoration. It was like pearls before swine. To that figure, being played with until it broke to pieces was probably its most cherished desire.”

“...”

“It’s surprisingly difficult to cherish something,” Kana said as he looked like he was gazing someplace far away. He then let out a little sigh and said, “In the end, when Ura opened the box and played with that figure to his heart’s content three years later, even he said, ‘I should have opened it sooner.’”

“Yeah, he did... So why are you bringing up this story all of a sudden?”

“No reason. It just popped into my head for some reason,” Kana said mysteriously and a bit condescendingly. I’m not very perceptive, so I didn’t really get what my aloof, know-it-all of a friend was hinting at.



After Orihara-san and Uomi came back from the bathroom, the four of us

talked together for a little bit and then parted ways. After that, Orihara-san and I looked around the stalls in the square. Soon it was time for the taiko drum performance, and the happi coat-wearing members of the Taiko Preservation Society got on stage and began to play. The sound of their drumsticks beating the taiko drums shook the summer's night. The sound of the large drums was low and deep while the small drums produced a light sound. This was joined by the smooth sound of a flute to make fierce, exhilarating music.

"Wow. I didn't think it would be this powerful."

"Yeah... It's amazing." We watched the stage from the corner of the shrine's square. We were transfixed by the boisterous yet enjoyable sound of the taiko drums, but in the middle of the performance, Orihara-san started to look sick again. She was breathing just as hard as before—if not more so. There was sweat on her forehead, and she was clearly not feeling well.

"O-Orihara-san? Are you really okay?"

"S-Sorry... I don't think I can make it. I can't take it anymore..." she said in a weak voice, and my anxiety and fear shifted into high gear.

"Let's take a break right now. There's a place to sit over there, or maybe we should go to the first aid tent..." I was panicking and desperately trying to think of something when Orihara-san tightly grabbed my hand.

"Momota-kun... Come this way..."

"What?"

"Please..." I hesitated, but Orihara-san pulled me from the middle of the crowd and away from the stage. We moved further and further to where there weren't any people, and we finally ended up in the woods next to the shrine. We continued on an unmarked path through the dense trees and finally stopped at a slightly open area. There were no signs of anyone around us, and the lights from the festival and sounds of the taiko drums had become far away.

"U-Um..."

"...I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, Momota-kun." The only source of light in this dark place was the moonlight shining through the gaps in the trees. I was extremely confused as Orihara-san faced me and, with a flushed face and

ragged breathing, said, "Take off my yukata."

I gasped involuntarily. It was the summer festival, we were in the forest away from the crowds of people, and it was just the two of us. There was only one thing that all of this could mean, and my face turned red.

"Wh-What are you saying, Orihara-san?"

"I'm sorry. I know what I'm saying is strange, but... I can't take it anymore," she said, sounding like she really was at her wit's end as she got closer to me. She then fixed her tear-filled eyes on me and wouldn't let go. "Please, Momota-kun..."

"B-But then my first time would be in a place like this..."

"Huh? Your first time? Well, yeah, I would think it's your first time taking off a yukata, Momota-kun."

"I-I know it's shameful for a man to say no even when you're doing all of this for me, Orihara-san, but I want where I have my first time to be somewhere memorable..."

"Huh? Wh-What do you mean?" Orihara-san said, puzzled. "...M-Momota-kun, are you sure you're not misunderstanding something?"

"M-Misunderstanding? H-Huh? Weren't you inviting me to...do it with you, right here and now?"

"Do it with you?! N-No!" Orihara-san's face turned bright red as she shook her head. "Wh-Why are you even talking about something like that?!"

"Huh?! I mean, you were telling me to take off your yukata, Orihara-san!"

"What I meant was that I wanted you to take off my yukata's sash belt because it was too tight, and I couldn't breathe!" Orihara-san yelled. She then proceeded to speak between ragged breaths. "I've never properly worn one before, but I didn't know that you're...supposed to flatten your breasts when you wear a yukata or a kimono."

"Flatten your breasts?"

"They say it looks better that way. It's considered undignified if your breasts are on top of the sash. That's why my sister said that people like me whose

breasts...have a large presence have to flatten their breasts, or it won't look nice." When I shifted my gaze to her chest again, it did seem like Orihara-san's breasts didn't have their usual presence. Her two hills that were always so pronounced were much more modest today.

"My sister tried a lot of different things to make me look more cylindrical, like wrapping a towel around my stomach, and she wrapped a cloth around my breasts to make it tighter, so there's a lot of pressure..."

"That's why you were out of breath this whole time?"

"...Yes. The truth is it's been kind of painful since our date started," Orihara-san said apologetically, and she looked down at the ground. "I tried to loosen it in the bathroom earlier, but since it was tight all over my body, I couldn't really do it myself... So I wanted you to help me, Momota-kun."

"...I see. I totally thought that... No, I mean..." I muddled my words, but it was too late, and Orihara-san pouted as her face turned red.

"J-Jeez. Why did you think of something so naughty?"

"S-Sorry... But I don't think it's my fault, you know? I mean, you brought me to a place with no one else around and told me in a sexy voice, 'Take it off.'"

"I-I wasn't using a sexy voice! It was just hard to breathe, so my voice was weak..."

At any rate, I understand what's going on. While we're talking like this, Orihara-san is in a lot of pain. This is no time to be bashful. I suppressed my embarrassment and reached for her yukata.

"Um... What should I do?"

"F-For now, bring the knot of the sash belt to the front. Take this and turn it as hard as you can."

"I grab here and twist it, right?"

"Yes, please. Next, if you put your hand in here it will probably..."

We were both unfamiliar with the task, and we struggled with it for a few minutes. After removing the sash belt and unfastening the waist cord and Velcro belt, there was no longer anything tying her down. Her yukata was

undone with a flutter, and the white cloth that had once been alternately layered opened like double doors.

“Phew...” Having been released from the pressure of having her breasts tied down, Orihara-san exhaled deeply. Her yukata being undone caused the towel she had wrapped around her waist to make herself more cylindrical to fall to the ground. At the same time, a white cloth also fell off her. It must have been the one that she had used to flatten her breasts which meant...

“Phew... That feels good...” Orihara-san looked relieved and ecstatic to finally be able to take a deep breath.

“Uh...” As I looked at her, I froze. *They* were in full view. Her clothes had fallen off, so there was nothing left to hide them. From the opening in her yukata, her sensual body was exposed. Her buxom, heavy breasts jiggled and shook from her ragged breathing. Her huge breasts, which were exposed all the way to their tips, were moist and sweaty.

Also, it wasn't just her breasts. Her slim waist, her fleshy thighs: everything about her body was so provocative that its intensity and beauty was overwhelming.

Also, there was her scent. She must have been steaming from the heat because a sweet smell rose up from her yukata being undone. It didn't smell bad; it was the same pleasant scent of Orihara-san that I smelled whenever I was close to her—it's just that it was many times thicker than usual. Being shown her naked body at close range had overwhelmed my senses of sight and smell.

“Huh? Wh-What's wrong, Momota-kun? Where are you looking at—eek?!” Orihara-san seemed to finally realize the disastrous state she was in, let out a way-too-late scream, and closed the front of her yukata. “Ahhh... Wh-Why is this happening to me?! Oh no... The cloth fell to the ground.” Panicked, she closed the front of her yukata and turned around. “I'm sorry for showing off how unseemly I look... B-But you should have told me instead of just staring, Momota-kun.”



I barely heard her words of embarrassment. My heart was beating unbelievably fast. The backs of my eyes were stinging. The image of her naked body that was burned into my retinas and her scent that lingered in the back of my nose were both making my brain go numb. My thoughts were becoming duller and duller, and I felt like I was losing consciousness. It was like something inside of me had snapped. The next thing I knew, I was...

“...Momota-kun? What’s wrong—eek?!” Thinking it was weird that she got no response, Orihara-san turned around to look at me, and the moment she did I hugged her from behind with all my might and by force. I hugged her slender back as hard as I could.

“Wh-What are you doing... M-Momota-kun?” I ignored her confusion and stretched out my arms. I put my hands in the gaps of her yukata, and I touched them. I touched her chest—her exposed breasts—roughly, without permission.

“Ah!” she exclaimed as her body sprung up with a jolt in my arms. Even still, I didn’t stop. I clutched her breasts and squeezed them with my pulsating instinct. The first breasts of a woman that I had ever touched were huge and incredibly soft. They were so supple that my fingers seemed to sink into them endlessly, and I felt like I wanted to touch them forever. The sensual feeling on the palms of my hands made my brain feel like it was melting.

“Orihara-san!” As I savored the feeling of her soft skin, I called out her name—the name of the person I was so in love with I couldn’t stand it. It was as if the words had leaked from my lips.

The truth is that I’d always wanted to do this. I longed to thrust my desire upon her. Ever since we started dating, I fantasized about doing this over and over again. In my fantasies, Orihara-san was lewd and sensual and I was just as aggressive and manly in turn as we exposed everything to each other and savored the depths of each other’s bodies.

However, there was no way I could do something like that in real life. My first girlfriend was pretty, beautiful, cute, and precious. I wanted to cherish her. I thought that I wanted to treasure her from the bottom of my heart. I thought that I mustn’t defile her or thrust my desires onto her.

Orihara-san was a respectable adult woman who works at a major

corporation. Normally, there was no way a high school boy like me would have been a good match for her. I didn't have money or social status. I had nothing, but I wanted to at least be "a good boyfriend" on the inside. I wanted at least my attitude to be like that of a prince. Even if I had to be out of my league and bluff, I wanted to be a boyfriend she could be proud of. I wanted to be the type of boyfriend that her and her friends would look at and think, "He's a good boyfriend."

No... It might just be that I was only afraid. I was afraid of being hated. I was afraid of defiling her with my ugly desires. I was afraid of hurting the person who I cherished more than anyone else. Just like the way I was hiding half of my face with a mask, I was hiding the ugly part of my heart and just wanted her to see my good side. However, right now my mask had come off. All my reason and all my pride had been blown away, and the only thing driving my body was my bare desire. My hands moved instinctively over her ample breasts over and over again.

"Stop..." she said. From within my arms, she turned her head to look back at me and said, "Stop it, Momota-kun... I-It hurts..."

"Oh..." In an instant, it felt like I had been thrown into ice water, and all of the heat left my body. My brain that had felt like it was hazy from anesthesia and my train of thought that had felt numb had awakened all at once. She was looking at me with fear in her eyes. Her expression was twisted in fear, and her body trembled slightly. *She's afraid of me...*

"I-I'm... I'm s-sorry... I..." I took my hands off of her and backed away from her. However, I tripped over my feet and fell on my backside. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! I... I..." I got down on my hands and knees and apologized. I couldn't lift my head, as I was too afraid to look her in the face. I lowered my head like I was rubbing it on the ground and kept repeating my apology.

I'm horrible. What I did was just too horrible. What the hell was I doing? I lost sight of myself, forcibly grabbed her, and violently squeezed her breasts without her permission. I was absolutely disgusting.

A little while ago after our date at the aquarium, Orihara-san had told me that I could touch her breasts. In a way, I had already received her permission to

touch her breasts. However, at the time I acted cool and refused her offer. I said stuff like I'll be smooth about it and touch her breasts when the mood is right. I said all of that cool stuff, but right now, just what was I doing? This wasn't the right mood, and I wasn't smooth about it. Quite the opposite, I touched them in the worst way I can think of by not reading the mood. I succumbed to my sexual desire and forcefully touched them.

"I'm... sorry..." I was so pathetic, lame, and worthless that tears welled up in my eyes. I squeezed the hard earth that I felt on my palms with my intense self-loathing.

"...Momota-kun." She called out to me, but I couldn't raise my head.

"Orihara-san, I'm sorry. I'm truly..." Even though I knew I had no right to ask for forgiveness, I didn't know what to do aside from repeating my apology.

I'm ashamed and disgraceful. I wish I could just disappear.

"Huh?" Just when I felt like I was going to be crushed by my guilt and how pitiful I felt, I found myself being enveloped in a soft sensation. Hands were wrapped around my head, and I was being hugged tightly. My face was...in the cleavage of Orihara-san's breasts. Her yukata was still open, and her breasts caught my face while they were still exposed. Her sweet scent and sweat-soaked soft skin gently enveloped me as I felt like I was going to die from self-loathing. "What... O-Orihara-san?"

"It's okay." Her voice was infinitely kind. I fearfully looked up, and our eyes met. "It's okay. You don't have to apologize any more." She looked down at me with the gentle look of a loving mother. In her eyes I saw absolutely no anger or fear, only kindness and warmth.

"Y-You're not mad?"

"No, I'm not mad."

"..."

"That was a lie. The truth is I'm a little mad. I mean... I was really surprised that you suddenly started squeezing my boobs. You were so rough, and so forceful...and it kind of hurt," Orihara-san said, sounding slightly miffed.

“I-I’m sorry, I...”

As I was at a loss for words, Orihara-san hesitantly continued, “Um... You couldn’t control yourself when you looked at my boobs?”

“No, I... Y-Yes, that’s right.”

“I see... Well, then I forgive you,” Orihara-san said surprisingly casually.

“...Huh? Y-You can’t forgive me for something like that—”

“I can. It was just a boyfriend touching his girlfriend’s boobs, after all.” Her voice was so gentle and warm that it seemed to take in all of my foolishness and immaturity and melt them away. As I was speechless, she continued and said, “Um, you touched me so forcefully I was really surprised and a little scared, but... I was also a little happy.”

“What?”

“Oh. Um, I-I don’t mean anything weird by that! It’s just like... I was happy that you wanted me so badly...”

“...”



“You always take really good care of me, right, Momota-kun? You only think of me instead of yourself. Of course, that makes me really happy, and I love how kind and sincere you are, but... There’s a small part of me that wishes you were more selfish.”

“Selfish?”

“That’s why I was happy that you only thought about yourself and your own desires when you came for me so aggressively.”

“...”

“B-But that doesn’t mean that I want you to do it like that again, okay?! I just... I want to see more sides of you, Momota-kun,” Orihara-san said. It seemed like she was searching for the right words. “I want to see the sides of you that are kind and cool...and the sides of you that aren’t kind and cool. I want you to show me the parts of you that aren’t ‘a good boyfriend.’ I mean... I’m your girlfriend, Momota-kun. There’s nothing that would make me happier than knowing a part of you that no one else does.”

“Orihara-san...”

“Ha ha ha... I wonder if this makes me selfish. It’s like my possessive side is on full display.”

Selfishly wanting your partner to be more selfish... When you think about it, that definitely is a kind of possessiveness: I mean, you want to be the only one who knows a certain side of the person you love.

However, that’s probably a desire that everyone has when they fall in love... Oh, wow. I wonder why I didn’t realize it before. I wanted to be a tolerant and accepting boyfriend, and I didn’t want to make my girlfriend feel overwhelmed. I wanted to be the kind of great boyfriend that would make her feel comfortable around me and want to rely on me. If that’s the case, it’s no wonder that Orihara-san had the same feelings and desires as me. She wanted me to relax and be honest with her. She wanted me to be more selfish and be spoiled by her.

“It’s okay to depend on me more, Momota-kun.” Orihara-san hugged me to her large chest, and then she said, “I’ll accept you even if you make ugly mistakes or show me your uncool side. I’ll accept you, wrap you up, and pamper

you.”

“ ... ”

“Th-Though, unfortunately, I’m not very motherly or accepting,” Orihara-san added, mocking herself.

“That’s not true...” I said to her and shook my head. “Right now, you feel very motherly.”

“Huh? R-Really? Am I really being motherly?” she said, surprised. It seems like she didn’t realize just how much warmth she had wrapped me in.

Maybe it was the other way around. I wonder if the reason that Orihara-san wasn’t really able to be motherly was because of me and not her? I tried to hide my ugly side by acting cool and trying to be a “good boyfriend.” I refused to show any weakness. I thought that depending on my girlfriend was something shameful.

In the end, that vanity and pride was probably nothing more than my own self-satisfaction. All it meant was that I didn’t trust her because of my lack of self-confidence. Since I wasn’t good at depending on her, Orihara-san wasn’t able to show her maternal side. My real girlfriend is kind, warm, and motherly and so accepting of all my mistakes and failings. She’s the best older girlfriend I could ever ask for.

At some point, the fireworks had started. In the narrow bits of sky that peeked through the gaps in the trees, flowers made of gunpowder bloomed in time with loud noises. The two of us did our best to fix the tattered yukata and somehow got it back into shape. As we exited the forest, the fireworks show was already reaching its climax. Of course, all the places where you could get a good view of the fireworks were already filled up, and we could only watch them from the corner of the shrine where our view was obstructed by buildings and large trees.

“I’m sorry. This is my fault,” I said and lowered my head.

“I’ve already said it’s okay. No more apologizing, okay?” she said teasingly. “Watching fireworks like this has its own kind of charm.”

We both looked up at the sky. Since the show had reached its finale, a ton of

fireworks were fired off in rapid succession, filling the night sky with bright lights. Fireworks bloomed in the sky that was cramped with branches and buildings.

“Wow... It’s so pretty.”

“It sure is,” I said, and we both enjoyed watching these imperfect, broken fireworks. Suddenly, I remembered Kana’s words: “It’s difficult to cherish something.”

I finally understand what he was implying when he said that. I hate how I was so unperceptive that I wasn’t able to understand it until I made such a pitiful display of myself.

I thought I was taking care of Orihara-san in my own way. I was trying to take care of my precious girlfriend. However, that may have just been like keeping a toy in a box and putting it on display. I was so afraid of hurting her that I hesitated to even touch her with my own hands. This wasn’t so. In the end, it was just for my ego—my ego and my own self-protection. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to hurt her, I was just afraid of getting hurt by reaching out to her.

Of course, I don’t think I was all wrong. By no means do I think that trying to be “a good boyfriend” is wrong. However, I should probably try to depend on her a little more. After all, depending on someone is surely the same as trusting them. I can trust this person, and she will accept me...

“...Hime.”



A shiver ran down my spine, and I was surprised at just how sensitive my reaction was.

“Huh? Y-You mean me?” When I asked Momota-kun this obvious question, he shyly scratched his cheek and nodded. “...Yes.”

“Wh-Why did you say my first name?”

“I’m sorry. I wanted to try saying it. The truth is... I’ve wanted to try calling you by your first name for a while.”

“...”

“Earlier, you said you wanted me to be a little more selfish, so...” His voice was muffled at the end, so it was hard to hear what he was saying.

I mean, yeah, I told him to be more selfish. I definitely said that, but I didn't think he'd become so selfish this soon!

“I mean, I'm sorry for using your name so familiarly.”

“No, that's totally fine...” *What should I do? My face feels surprisingly hot, and I'm really flustered from just being called by my first name.*

Before I knew it, I said, “One more time...”

“What?”

“I want you to call my name again... Maybe. Is that okay?”

Momota-kun looked surprised at first, but then he looked straight at me. He looked a little shy, but without looking away, he said, “Hime.”

“Ah!”

Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god! He's just saying my name, but I can't believe how much it's making my heart flutter. I didn't realize just how much being called my first name by my younger boyfriend would make me lose my composure! Even though I have some hangups about my name, now it's setting my heart ablaze!

“K-Kaoru-kun,” I said, calling my boyfriend's name with all my might. I had always wanted to try calling out the name of my boyfriend, the person that I love.

At first, Momota-kun looked a little bewildered, but he soon smiled. He was a little embarrassed, but he smiled gently. “Hime...”

“Kaoru-kun...” We called each other's names, looked at one another, and before long, we both laughed.

“Ha ha. It feels weird, huh?”

“Ha ha ha... Yeah, I can't get used to it.”

“What should we call each other from now on?”

“Hmm. Maybe...we should stick with our last names for a little while longer?”

It's still a little embarrassing."

Saying his first name is embarrassing, but being called by my first name is even more embarrassing. It's like, it's really bad for my heart. If I were called "Hime" while I was on the street, I'd probably go crazy from how nervous I'd be.

"Okay. Then, we'll continue like we have been doing."

"Yeah."

"But... If it feels like the mood is right, I'll probably say it again."

"...O-Okay."

Oh, he's being kind of assertive. So, this is what a slightly selfish Momota-kun is like. Is this Momota-kun's true form after releasing all his desires?

"...He he." I giggled a bit.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing. It's just kind of weird. We've already done a lot of things like hold hands, kiss, and...you've t-touched my boobs."

"..."

"We've done all that, so it's weird how we're having trouble with something as simple as saying each other's first names."

"It's true that those things might be out of order," Momota-kun laughed. "Still, I'm sure it's fine like this. There probably is no right order in love."

"Yeah, you're right."

There's no right order in love. It's not weird to kiss, have your boobs fondled, and then be embarrassed by having someone call your name... Well, it's probably a little weird, but there's nothing bad about it. For example, it's like, just because you were physically intimate with someone before you started dating doesn't mean that you're insincere. I think that the order of love is different for every couple.

"...Oh. The fireworks are already over," Momota-kun said as he looked up at the night sky. I looked up at the summer sky and saw that the sparkling fireworks were already gone and replaced by faintly shining stars. Also, a

broadcast announcing the end of the fireworks was playing in the distance.

“No way... I’m sorry. We missed the most exciting part because I said that weird stuff, didn’t we...?”

“No, it’s fine. It all started because of my blunder after all.” In a somewhat passionate voice, Momota-kun continued: “Besides, I was watching something more beautiful than the fireworks.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” I asked, not knowing what he meant.

Momota-kun’s shoulders slumped in disappointment, and he said, “Why don’t you get it?”

“H-Huh? Oh. W-Were you talking about me?!” When I finally understood what Momota-kun meant I raised my voice in astonishment, and he shyly hid his face with his hand. “Oh no... I’m so sorry. You said something so romantic...”

“You really are something, Orihara-san.”

“Huh? What does that mean?” As we repeated our regrettable back and forth, a broadcast was sounding off in the distance announcing the end of the festival.

Our first ever summer festival was filled with a lot of trouble and accidents, and it was exhausting until the very end. However, I feel like the distance between our hearts had once again shortened.

≡ Epilogue

Summer break had come to an end, and I was getting my mind and body that had become used to being on break adjusted to going to school again. About five days had passed, and just when I thought I had finally gotten used to normal school life, I was back on break.

It was a Saturday morning of the first weekend after summer break ended. Our father had gathered my sister and me so all three of us were together in the parlor of our house.

“Jeez, why did you call us here so early in the morning, Dad?” my sister said listlessly while resting her chin on her hands.

“U-Um... Well, the thing is...” My father was sitting across the table facing my sister and me. He sounded awkward, and his expression looked stiff and tense. “The truth is... There’s something I wanted to talk about with you guys.”

“Is it something that you have to be so formal about like this?” my sister asked.

“Yeah, I guess it is.”

“What is it?”

“Well, I mean it’s... You know...” Pressed to talk by my sister, my father’s words became obscure and muddled. He was being uncharacteristically vague.

“Could it be...that you’re sick? Did you find out you have a serious disease?”

“No. My body is extremely healthy. In fact, at my medical checkup the other day I was told that my physical age was in the twenties.”

“In that case... Is it debt? Is it the end for our clinic?”

“No! Our business is doing well!”

“Okay, then what is it?”

“Well, um, it’s...”

My father once again started muddling his words, and I could tell my sister

was becoming increasingly frustrated, so I spoke up and said, “Dad... Is it bad news?”

My father shook his head and said, “It’s...not bad news. In fact, it’s good news... I mean, I want you guys to feel like it’s good news...” After hesitating for a little while, my father spoke as if he’d made up his mind and said, “The truth is, there’s someone I’d like to introduce to you guys.”

For a moment, my sister and I couldn’t speak, but we soon understood what he meant.

“Dad... Does that mean—”

“You found someone to get remarried to?” Our father waved his hand like he was embarrassed by our questions.

“Things haven’t gotten that far. But... She’s someone that I’m considering that kind of future with. That’s why I thought I should introduce her to you guys as well.”

“Oh, I see. Here I thought my dad was just a big oaf when he’s actually been pretty busy,” my sister said and grinned.

“J-Just so you know... I haven’t forgotten about you guys’ mother, alright? My memories with your mother will always be in my heart. And as far as I’m concerned, Kozue is the only mother you two have. But... That’s why...”

“Yeah, yeah, we don’t need any of that,” my sister said, totally cutting off my father as he started to speak seriously. “It’s a happy occasion and I give you my blessing. Congratulations, dad,” my sister said in a very casual tone. “Well, if I were an elementary or middle schooler, I would probably make a little bit of a fuss, but... I turned twenty last month. I’m an adult now. At this age, I’m not going to complain about my dad getting remarried,” she said jokingly.

My sister then slightly lowered her tone and continued: “Dad, you’ve been raising us by yourself for over ten years since Mom died. There’s no way I could complain now about you getting a new girlfriend. And I think that even Mom in heaven...would probably smile and approve of this.”

“Kaede...”

“Isn’t that right, Kaoru? You feel the same way, don’t you?”

“Yeah,” I said and gave a firm nod. “I feel the same way as Kaede. I’m not going to say anything if it’s your choice, dad.”

“Kaoru... Th-Thank you.” Overcome with emotion, my father gave a small bow. “Okay, I’ll bring her here right now,” my dad said, suddenly dropping a bombshell.

“What? R-Right now?” my sister said, taken aback, and my dad nodded at her.

“Yeah. Actually, I have her waiting in the car. Just wait a second, I’ll go get her right now.” As soon as my dad said that, he walked right out of the parlor and left us there. All we could do was be stunned.

“Right now? That’s pretty soon.”

“Seriously. But I’m glad that dad got himself a girlfriend,” my sister said sincerely. “It seemed like he was popular with our older lady customers, but he’s just so...hard-headed and old fashioned. He totally didn’t seem like he had a girlfriend.”

“Well, I guess that just means that dad rises to the occasion. He’s still thirty-eight after all, so it wouldn’t be weird if he got a girlfriend.”

“Oh hey, look at you sounding like a know-it-all now that you have a girlfriend,” my sister said sarcastically and smiled. “Jeez, the men of this household sure seem to be in heat lately. Dad’s got a girlfriend, and so do you.”

“...Shut up.”

“I need to hurry up and get myself a boyfriend too,” my sister whined as she put her hands behind her head. Just then, my dad came back.

“S-Sorry to keep you guys waiting.” My dad entered the parlor first, turned back to the hallway, and said, “Please, come this way,” as he led in the person he was currently dating—the person who would probably become my new mother. I straightened my posture, waited nervously, and was astonished when I saw the woman who appeared.

She was a beautiful woman with soft features. Her long, elegant hair was tied up in a single ponytail. Her outfit was modest and wasn’t very revealing, but she

had a voluptuous body that couldn't be hidden. I thought she looked beautiful. I also thought she looked a lot like the woman I loved. Or rather, she was someone I actually knew very well.

"N-Nice to meet you. My name is Orihara Kiseki," the lady, Kiseki-san, said. The woman that my dad brought to our house was Kiseki-san, Orihara-san's older sister.

"Wow, she's so beautiful. Dad, how did you manage to catch someone like this?"

"Q-Quiet, Kaede! Don't be rude." My dad got mad at my sister's teasing but seemed somewhat happy about it.

My sister elbowed me, and in a voice that only I could hear, teased me by saying, "She really resembles her. Even her last name is the same. Talk about 'like father, like son.'"

I couldn't say anything. No words came to me, and my brain stopped working. "Like father, like son." It was like some kind of bad joke. Looking back, there may have been some foreshadowing. On the day that I ran into Kiseki-san at the station, she'd said that she had a date, but on that same day my dad said he had 'business to attend to' when he left the house. Also, there was their age. Kiseki-san is thirty-four years old, and my father is thirty-eight years old. Without a doubt, he's slightly older than her...

"I've been dating Shigeru-san for a little while now. I know it won't happen right away, but if I could get to know the two of you little by little, I'd—huh?" Kiseki-san's face froze as she continued to greet us with a nervous look on her face. It appeared that she finally noticed me.

"...What? What?!" The nervous and anxious-looking expression she had from meeting her boyfriend's kids for the first time was instantly replaced by one of shock and confusion.

I had no idea what to do. I went beyond being shocked and felt despair, and then went beyond despair to just feel emptiness. Just what do you have to do wrong to end up in such an outlandish and crazy situation?

I'm Momota Kaoru, and I'm just about to be sixteen years old. My girlfriend is

an adult who is eleven years and ten months older than me, and right now it seemed like her older sister was going to become my stepmother.



Afterword

“The opposite of like isn’t dislike, but indifference” is a common expression, and I think it’s such an important phrase that it’s difficult to tell who said it first. It’s a phrase that’s really sensible and to the point, but I personally think that it’s very preliminary.

Rather than focusing on any one individual, it’s like taking a bird’s-eye view or thinking about things on the whole. When we focus more on the individual... Perhaps it’s that once you really like someone, you can’t go back to being indifferent to them, and you can only go back and forth on a number line between like and dislike.

However, the human heart isn’t as simple as a number line. Once you start to hate someone, everything they do annoys you. On the other hand, once you fall in love with someone, you start to love even that person’s faults. In that case, the direction on the number line opposite “like” can trend so deeply that it loops back toward “love,” and I find that to be a wonderfully precious thing.

And with that, I am Kota Nozomi, and this is the fourth installment of the rom-com with a heroine that is pushing thirty. As I wrote in the afterword of volume three, the story I had initially planned ended at volume three, and volume four marks the start of a story that I hadn’t planned.

The following is a spoiler: concerning the bombshell I dropped at the end of this volume... It was, how should I say, the result of the characters acting on their own. When I had Nanasemeruchi make the character design for Momota’s father for the manga, he turned out much cooler than I’d expected. So, I thought, “He looks like he’d be a popular dad who could get remarried quickly,” and that’s how I came up with the ending this time. The true pleasure of a light novel is when the chemical reaction between the author and the illustrator surpasses the author’s expectations...is how I’m going to say it, so it sounds nice.

And now for a sudden announcement. The second volume of the Slightly Older Girlfriend manga will be released at about the same time as this fourth volume of the light novel, so please look forward to it. It has some special extra

manga, a new short story by me, and is really gorgeous.

Now then, my thanks. To my supervisor, Nakamizo, thank you once again for your help. I'm sorry for how random my schedule was. To Nanasemeruchi, thank you for the wonderful illustrations this time as well. I really enjoyed getting to see Orihara-san in various styles of clothing like her casual clothes, bathing suit, and pajamas. Also, I would like to give my deepest gratitude to you, the reader, who picked up this book. May our paths cross again in volume five.

**Are You Okay
With a Slightly
Older Girlfriend?**

**~The Opposite
of Like is Love~**



vol.
4

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CHARACTERS

Are you ready with a slightly older girlfriend?

"W-Wow... Momo, are you always this thoroughly prepared?"



KANAO HARUKA

"Look, Momota. They look tasty, right?"



UOMI UTA

"I didn't think I'd get to see a side of you that was actually good at communicating."



IBUSUKI SAKI

"Tell me your birthday! You won't get away with this if you're younger than me!"



URANO IZUMI

"Did you actually think you were motherly?"



SHIRAI YUKI

"I can't afford to take my time."



ORIHARA KISAKI

"You're amazing, Momota-kun. You know everything about me."



ORIHARA HIME

"You're wonderful just the way you are, Orihara-san."



MOMOTA KAORU

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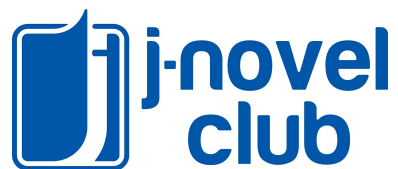
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Nanase meruchi

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